

## Sermon – Sunday July 4, 2021

**2 Corinthians 12:2-10**

**Mark 6:1-13**

### Healing and Hope

Canada Day looked very different this year, and rightly so, based on the findings of the 215 unmarked graves at the residential school in Kamloops and the 751 unmarked graves found at the former Marieval Indian Residential School on Cowessess First Nation, just 140km east of Regina.

Our national Bishop Susan Johnson also wrote a letter to the church in advance of Canada Day. In the letter, she encouraged ELCIC members to join her in reflection of how we got here as a country and what we need to do to move towards reconciliation. In the letter she states:

*This year, with the recent discoveries of unmarked graves at several sites of former residential schools, I am keenly aware of the children who did not return home and of the trauma being experienced by survivors of residential schools and generations affected by intergenerational trauma.*

*This Canada Day, I will not be wearing my usual red and white. I will be wearing orange to remember that every child matters.*

I was inspired by our national bishop's example and her words. I felt the right thing for me to do on Canada Day was to attend the vigil that began at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum and walked down Albert Street to the Saskatchewan Legislature Building where the backdrop of the speakers, singers, and dancers were the hundreds of backpacks meant to be a stark visual reminder of the 751 unmarked graves found on Cowessess First Nation.

Kathy Tiefenbach, our church council chairperson, and I were brainstorming how to honour this current reality on our church sign as an important witness to our neighbourhood and all those driving by.

Kathy came up with the message that will soon go up on the sign board:

*Learning from the past*

*Listening to the truth*

*Determined to do better*

One of the things I love about this message is the use of verbs – these are action words reminding us that as people of faith, we are people of action.

I also appreciate the recognition of the past, present, and future, as well as the recognition that the learning and listening is ongoing – a current and future reality.

It is also a hopeful and hope-filled message – a message that expresses our commitment to do better.

As people of faith, we **are** committed to do better, not because we have to, but because we **desire** to live out God's call of love, grace, and forgiveness in our lives.

When we ask ourselves as individuals, as a community of faith, what is God calling us to do in the face of these atrocities, we need only to look as far as the wisdom on our church sign:

Learning from the past  
Listening to the truth  
Determined to do better

How do we do this?

We do this through the grace of God working in us and through us as we seek healing and live in hope.

In the first reading today, we heard in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth that God says to us, "My grace is sufficient for you." This reading reminds us that where we are weak, God is strong. In other words, our weaknesses give God room to work!

God says to us: My grace is sufficient for you.

Sometimes we make grace out to be far more difficult than it is. I was reminded of this recently at my dad's graveside service, of all places.

Among the many things I told the pastor about my dad, was that he loved watching Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. So to honour my dad's love of these game shows - as well as my dad's sense of humour - as part of his message, Pastor Greg led us in a couple of impromptu games of Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. For the Wheel of Fortune, Pastor Greg was asking us to choose letters for the following word: **\_RA\_E**

Several of us were shouting out consonants, but none of us got it, not even this seminary graduate with 20 years of ministry experience.

But in my defense my brain was mush and I was simply relieved I made it through the eulogy!

For those of you who struggled as I did to guess this word, the word was GRACE.

My reflection is that we can make grace so hard, more difficult than it needs to be, when it is right there for us. It's not even about taking it or accepting it. It's about recognizing it, and then choosing what to do with it, choosing how we will live our lives in response to it.

Grace is a free gift given to all of us.

But grace is not cheap, it is costly.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, anti-Nazi dissident, wrote a book in 1937 called *The Cost of Discipleship*. In the book, Bonhoeffer describes costly grace and cheap grace.

Grace is costly because it cost Jesus his life.

On the other hand, cheap grace - as defined by Bonhoeffer - is an approach to Christianity that only emphasizes the good or easy parts without telling the truth regarding the difficult aspects of it. To leave out the more difficult aspects of repentance, confession, discipleship, the cross, or the full story of Christ's life offers an incomplete, or "cheap" view of God's grace.

Bonhoeffer says that "*Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.*"

Costly grace includes discipleship, the cross, and Jesus. Costly grace also offers us wisdom and guidance on where we go from here.

There are many ways we could respond to the atrocities of the residential schools. Hearing about those atrocities and the racism and inequality that continues to exist in our world reminds me of when I went to see the movie "*Dances with Wolves*" in 1990. The movie is described as an American epic Western film that tells the story of Union Army Lieutenant John J. Dunbar (played by Costner), who travels to the American frontier to find a military post, and of his dealings with a group of Lakota.

It is a movie that depicts the mistreatment of indigenous people. I would have been 22 years old when the movie came out. I remember being quite moved by it. And I will never forget the 3 different ways that 3 different people in my life responded to that movie. I will preface this by saying that all 3 people were white folks.

The first person said, "I feel like a punching a white person!"

The second person said, "I'm so ashamed of being white."

The third person said, "I want to hug an indigenous person." (*That person actually used a word that we now consider a slur, so I replaced it with something more politically correct*)

Do you hear the different emotions expressed in those responses?

The first was anger.

The second was shame.

The third was love.

We can choose how we respond to the crises in our lives and the crises in our world. We can respond with anger, shame, or love.

It is love that leads to reconciliation. It is reconciliation that leads to healing and healing leads to hope. What does hope look like?

Hope looks like repentance seeking forgiveness.

Hope is hundreds of people gathering on July 1, dressed in orange, in front of hundreds of backpacks, to listen and learn.

Hope is hearing stories of healing, forgiveness, and resilience.

Hope is standing in solidarity with.

Hope is building relationships.

God's grace is sufficient for us.

Grace also offers us wisdom and guidance on where we go from here.

Through the grace of God working in us and through us, as individuals and as a community of faith,  
may we continue to seek healing as we live in hope. Amen.

Written by Pastor Lynn Robertson