

Sermon for St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops

July 8, 2018

2 SAMUEL 5:1-5, 9-10; PSALM 48; 2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-10; MARK 6:1-13

“Creator we give you thanks for all you are and all you bring to us for our visit within your creation...give us strength to live together with respect and commitment as we grow in your spirit – for you are God, now and forever. Amen” – A Disciple’s Prayer Book.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we worship is the traditional, unceded territory of the Shuswap or Secwepemc peoples. At one time the Secwepemc people occupied one large Traditional territory covering approximately 145,000 square kilometers. In 1811, after European contact, the colonial government divided the Secwepemc people into 17 distinct groups with specific parcels of land designated to each. The word Kamloops is the English version of the Indigenous word for ‘where the rivers meet,’ and the peoples are the ‘people of the confluence.’ The reason I do this acknowledgement is to remind us that this land was inhabited by God’s people long before European settlers arrived, and to create a site of potential disruption for Indigenous invisibility, and the notion that the land here was empty, to be discovered.

My name is Melanie Delva and for 12 years I was the Archivist for the Anglican Diocese of New Westminster and Provincial Synod of BC and Yukon, I am now the Reconciliation Animator for the Anglican Church of Canada. I know what you’re thinking. I don’t draw cartoons! I am tasked with animating, or bringing life to the ongoing reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This is funny to me on a number of levels – the first being that I seem fated to have job titles that need explaining (first Archivist, now Animator!) and second because I have a confession to make. My name is Melanie and I am a recovering racist. Yep – you heard that right. You see, I was raised in a very rural community in Manitoba that was near to one of the larger Metis communities, and quickly learned that "Indians" as they were called are at best lazy, unintelligent, dirty and ungrateful and at worst, sub-human and not worthy of a continued presence on the earth.

Although through so-called "higher education" and life experience I came to tidy up those beliefs to make them more presentable and palatable to the growingly politically correct world in which I found myself, my thoughts really only moved from an overt racism to what I now believe to be a much more subtle and dangerous form of racism - that is, a pity for what I saw as a hopeless and helpless sector of society filled with poverty, violence and addiction who - if we intelligent, sophisticated, educated and motivated dominant society could find time and compassion to stoop to help - would really benefit from our intervention and assistance.

I still feel residual shame as I say these words – mostly because they are very similar to the words I read in the archives of the missionaries and government officials who set up and maintained the Residential Schools system.

My internal world started to shift as I began to review thousands of pages of records in our archives for transfer to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Anglican Church is a signatory to the Indian Residential Schools settlement agreement – an agreement that addressed the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history. Other than financial obligations, the only other legal obligation the churches had under the agreement was the production of records regarding the Residential School System. That's where the archivists came in. In my 12 years as archivist I worked with hundreds of IRS survivors and almost without exception, they told me part or all of their story of being "incarcerated" in the schools. The stories horrified me and made my skin crawl. So did the records. I have seen things and heard things and read things that showed me in literal black and white the evil that is possible within the hearts and minds of humanity.

This was the beginning of a journey of devastation and I believe redemption for me. In fact, the only reason I have hope for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on any level let alone a national or institutional church level is that I see my own journey of reconciliation and healing of the moral wound of racism as a microcosm of what is possible when we no longer fear the Light.

Today's Gospel reading, I believe, speaks very poignantly and directly to the reality of Indigenous-settler relations. Jesus, after traveling extensively and being well received in many places, goes home. He goes to the place he is familiar with. The place where one would think he should feel most safe, most understood, most respected. Instead, the religious leaders see him not as he is – one with a prophetic message, the Christ, the son of God. They take offense that he should be so bold as to assert and invoke the power of God, the incarnation of God's love on earth. They try to demean him by saying he is just a carpenter's son, they criticize him and try to put him back in his place – at their level. They want him to look like them, act like them, instead of recognizing the unique manifestation of the love of God that he is. Jesus is left remarking that a prophet is without honour in their own hometown.

In an article he titled *The Gospel Comes to North America*, National Indigenous Bishop Mark MacDonald wrote that "The basic operating assumption of the colonial mission to North America has been that the land and history that produced *European Christianity* was sacred, having a privileged role in the development and communication of Christian faith". In other words, the words European and Christianity could not be separated one from another. Upon the so-called "discovery" of the new world, North America, Turtle Island, there was never an assumption that the Indigenous People and the Land with which they related and on which they lived were part of the incarnation of God's love in the world. There was no seeking of the face of Christ in the people, no recognition of the manifestation of God's freedom and love and grace. Instead, Europeans wanted Indigenous people to look like them and act like them and when they did not, Europeans tried to demean and diminish. In their own lands – the Land on which God had placed them, their own "hometowns" as it were, Indigenous peoples were not

recognized as envoys of God's love and grace; as God's sacred people. Instead they were dispossessed, tortured, killed, oppressed. Prophets are without honour in their own hometown.

It would be comforting if we could say that the mistakes happened back then. That the early explorers, the early missionaries, the early government officials, Indian Agents, residential school principals – that they all missed the clues but we do not. But the unlikely prophets are amongst us even now and we somehow still fail to see them. They are the Indigenous communities without clean drinking water, the children in foster care, the addicts, the homeless. They are also the sundancers, the activists, the voices we are sometimes afraid of. We are surrounded by unlikely prophets. Do we see them? Do we honour them?

There is good news. Empty tomb style news. Road to Emmaus shaped news. There is resurrection in reconciliation. In being reconciled, the innate sacredness of the supposed other is recognized and respected. In reconciliation, all are healed. People ask me all the time what this all means - how they can pursue reconciliation. I tell them I think each person and each group of people needs to find their own way in their context and in a way that allows them to act with the highest degree of integrity. There is no one size fits all, but it always begins with relationship. I try to encourage people to go inward and look at their own understandings and assumptions before acting. If non-indigenous people act out of a place of shame and guilt or because we feel we know what it is that Indigenous people supposedly "need" from us, what we do will go awry in the same way that "good intentions" led to the residential school system. Reconciliation looks like listening to the voices of the unlikely prophets – of letting go of the need for them to look like us, act like us, be like us in order to take them seriously.

In the latter part of the Gospel passage, Jesus sends out the disciples. Telling them to take nothing but the power he has given them to overcome that which seeks to undermine the Gospel. So, my friends, let's go. Let's leave behind the myths we have learned about one another, the need for others to look and be like us, our desperation to find quick fixes to things, and let's go out trusting that God has given us the power to overcome all that which seeks to undermine the Gospel, beginning with that which may reside in our own selves. Because here is the best news yet – healing and reconciliation are available to all. ALL of us – if we are but willing to allow ourselves to be transformed and sent.

Thanks be to God.