Indigenous Day of Prayer – June 21, 2020
St. Clement's Anglican Church
Isaiah 40: 25-31 and John 1:1-18

June 21 is National Indigenous Peoples Day across Canada, a day on which we celebrate the many and varied cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. In 2010 General Synod added this observance to the Anglican Church liturgical calendar. In "church speak", the Indigenous Day of Prayer is called a Feast with Precedence; so when June 21 falls on a Sunday, as it does this year, the hope and expectation is that parishes across the land will make it a priority to mark this occasion together.

It is, I think, a day of joy and sorrow; a day to rejoice and a day to reflect.

It gives us the chance to learn about and appreciate more deeply the richness of Indigenous culture and spirituality; a day on which to celebrate successes in reconciliation. It is also a day on which to repent of the many sins wrought by the colonial attitudes brought to these shores and to acknowledge the lasting harms caused by oppressive systems imposed on the people of this land. Racism in its many ugly forms is, of course, getting a great deal of media attention at the moment, but unfortunately it is an issue that will not be resolved within any one news cycle.

I was reminded of this tension between the shining lights and the lingering shadows present in our ongoing work of reconciliation by a photograph recently posted by North Van Museum and Archives, our neighbours across the street. The photo dates from 1911, just a couple of years after St.

Clement's was first built. In it, ten men and women, dressed in their Sunday best, are standing around and on top of a giant fir tree that had been felled right here on Institute Road; if not on this property then very close to it.

In our present time we celebrate, as we should, this community of St. Clement's; this family of faith that has supported and sustained each other, that continues to foster lives centred around the love of God. But there is also room, as there should be, to remember what came before, the beauty that already existed in this place, and the loss of what *was* in making way for what *is*.

So I brought a number of feelings and questions to the scripture readings that were chosen for Indigenous Sunday. In that lovely passage from Isaiah, we are reminded that God is the creator of all the ends of the earth; he calls all beings and peoples by name. And then in John we are given that powerful image of Jesus Christ as the Word, there at the very beginning, the Word that was with God and the Word that is God. John tells us that through this Word all things came into being, not one thing came into being without him.

In these few words is summed up the divine force that Richard Rohr calls the Universal Christ. Rohr, a contemporary theologian and Franciscan priest, invites us to reframe our vision of the Christian faith; "instead of saying that God came *into* the world through Jesus," he writes, "it would be better to say that Jesus came *out of* an already Christ-soaked world."

The passage from John states that the Jesus we follow is the Christ who with God created all beings; whose life was the light of all people. If we accept this, we accept the presence of the Universal Christ in all peoples, beyond appearance, beyond race, beyond religious creed. Influential 20th century Christian theologian GK Chesterton wrote: "Your religion is not the church you belong to, but the cosmos you live inside of."

Our calling to seek Christ in all persons is a baptismal covenant, as is our vow to respect the dignity of every human being. We know that we do not live into these promises as well as we should. In giving life to humanity, God created vibrant diversity; it is we who turn difference into division. In this passage, John tells us that Christ came into the world, and his own people did not accept him. We continue to reject Christ when we fail to recognize him in the faces of people who do not share our appearance, or our background, or our culture.

As we seek reconciliation by learning to listen more deeply to each other's stories, we can be assured of rich gifts along the way. While the work remains ongoing, good news is already amongst us. Last summer, over 200 General Synod members voted almost unanimously for the establishment of a self-determining Indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada. Indigenous bishop Mark MacDonald was made archbishop of the already-thriving Indigenous Anglican community of faith.

And last week I read a news story about historic human remains that were found by a road crew in Kamloops. They were determined to be those of an indigenous woman who died over five centuries ago and who will now be laid to rest in the graveyard on the reserve. I was heartened to read the comments of the manager of language and culture for the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc band, who commended the excavator and the city for their response.

"The city was awesome," he said. "Everyone was very respectful, very appreciative of our customs and it was a great example of reconciliation in action."

It can be easy to despair at the divisive approach that is too often brought to our civic, political and personal discourse. But the good-news stories serve to remind us that we each hold the power to be a force for

positive change; that our actions, even small ones, are steps to a world in which we understand and appreciate differences while recognizing our primary, shared identity as people all beloved of one Creator.

One step we can take this very morning is to participate from home in the national service marking the Indigenous Day of Prayer. At 11 a.m. Archbishop Mark MacDonald and a number of other Indigenous bishops and friends are offering a wonderful online service infused with the spirituality of Indigenous practice. Our website has the details and I encourage you to take part in the celebration, either at 11 o'clock or as soon after as you are able.

I can tell you from personal experience how encouraging it is for church leaders when an online service garners a solid number of viewers. So each of us, by participating in the national service today, adds another worshipper to the fellowship in an act of prayer-filled solidarity with our Indigenous Anglican brothers and sisters.

In days and weeks to come, we can be alert for other opportunities to widen our embrace. We can read an article, ask a question, listen to someone's experience, or donate to causes that seek to build bridges across cultures. You will know better than I what might lend itself to your situation. But this morning, in the presence of each other and surrounded by the communion of saints, let us consider again our baptismal promise.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

And in silence or out loud, at home or in the pews, I invite you to respond with me again: *I will, with God's help*.

- The Rev. Peggy Trendell-Jensen