



June 25, 2021

Dear people of Peace, and fellow children of the Creator,

Yet again, in what has become a disturbingly regular occurrence, two Muslim women wearing hijabs were attacked in Alberta, this time in the community of St. Albert just outside of Edmonton. These atrocities are added to more than a dozen others in recent months. Such cowardly acts have surely not been random, but rather are deliberate hate-crimes intended to target people on the basis of their Islamic faith and the public expression of it.

At a recent open gathering for Janazah prayers on behalf of the members of the Afzaal family who were killed in a terrorist attack in London ON just two weeks ago, a Muslim friend and colleague spoke passionately about the need to not simply respond to these instances with increased security measures and political policies, but to “get to the roots” of Islamophobia. He asked those non-Muslims in attendance to step up in a particular way in this regard.

What are these roots, we might ask? And where do they come from?

With all honesty and humility, it must be confessed that, at least in part, they find their basis in a gross distortion of the Christian faith that is aptly described as “colonial Christendom”. This is, in effect, a heresy, which seeks to co-opt the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church into a system of supports for the historic and present sins of white supremacy, the doctrine of discovery, the enslavement of fellow humans, and cultural and racial genocide.

These roots are the very same that grew the system of the Indian Residential Schools and the wider project of colonization in this land we now call Canada. The bodies being recovered in these last days in places like Kamloops, Brandon, and the Cowessness First Nation, and the more announcements that will come, are evidence of how these roots have gone very deep into ground. The part played by the churches in planting of those seeds is shameful and tragic. It must be named and addressed.

Yesterday, June 24th, is the day in which the liturgical calendar of holy days in the Anglican Church of Canada invites remembrance of the birth of the prophet John the Baptist. His words recorded in the Gospels, and spoken to religious people of his time who had fallen into complicity with oppression, also seem as though they could be directly addressed to us in this

place and time: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance... Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

As people who follow the Way of Jesus today, a responsibility is now inherited to face these evils, including those that continue to bear the rotten fruits of racism, xenophobia, religious nationalism, spiritual arrogance, and the like in our wider society. It is time to go beyond words on a page into real commitments to action, and tangible systemic changes – to get to the roots of the problem, and throw the distorted branches into the fire. One place to start in is the churches themselves.

To the Muslim community in Edmonton and surrounding areas, this is also your home, and you deserve to be safe here. As your Christian neighbours, we commit anew to actively advancing interreligious dialogue and education about Islamic faith and its many cultural expressions, as well as to the building of relationships with Muslim siblings in our communities. We will not allow our faith to be twisted any longer into a justification for violence and hate.

To the First nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples in this region – territories of Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 – we will continue to listen, and, as we learn lessons which we should have learned long ago, we will turn our expressions of guilt and apology into actions that respect sovereign rights, the restitution of broken treaty promises, and the decolonization of ourselves and our relationships to buildings, people, and the land.

May God, the Great Creator, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, who has given us the will to say these things, give to us and all our members and communities the grace and power to do them.

The Very Reverend Alexandra Meek, Dean

The Venerable Travis Enright, Archdeacon for Indigenous Ministries

The Reverend Doctor Scott Sharman, Canon Theologian and Interfaith Coordinator