

July 4, 2021 – Pentecost 6 (Canada Day readings)  
The Rev. Peggy Trendell-Jensen

Today is the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, but this morning our readings were those the Book of Alternative Services recommends for use on Canada Day.

So for the past few days I have been sitting with these scripture passages while all around me individuals and institutions have tried to sort out how best to mark this year's national holiday in a time of humble reckoning with the many dreadful impacts of colonialism and racism, both past and continuing. And I found much in these passages to speak to us in these pews, in this land, in this time.

My attention was first caught by Jesus' statement that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. In the gospel passage he emphasizes to the disciples that they are no longer servants, but friends; in effect, he elevates them from learners to colleagues. By extension, all we who call ourselves disciples are to turn what we have learned from Jesus into our own fruitful ministry and mission. And Jesus says "I am giving you these commands that you may love one another."

Well, that sounded familiar, and I was reminded of the line in our national anthem: "True patriot love in all of us command."

So what is patriot love? If it is love of country, surely we are called to love the people who comprise that country. And Jesus says that we show our love by laying down our life for our friends. It is, I hope, unlikely that any of us here will be called to follow in Jesus's footsteps to an unjust execution. So what might laying down one's life look like?

In these times, I think laying down one's life can be the willingness to set aside the need for one's own story to predominate. It is putting ourselves on the back burner; listening to the voices we have not yet heard, and accepting the truth of realities that differ from our own. And that can be really hard. It is so natural to leap to the defence of the institutions, traditions and people we love. My granddad was not

involved with the residential schools, but I imagine that if he had been I might well be fighting tooth and nail to protect his reputation as the widely beloved priest I knew him to be. We all have a desire for our own closely-held understandings to be accepted as the dominant narrative of history in ways small and large.

But that isn't particularly helpful when it comes to relationship building. Imagine if a friend or colleague had experienced one of those societal injustices that comes along every so often. They may have had a bad ruling in their ICBC or WorkSafeBC case that has left them struggling and unsupported. Or they may be crushed and heartbroken because they see their children so seldom after a toxic family law dispute. In times like that, we know better than to jump in with our own tale of how we got great service from ICBC when we had an accident the year before. Or how pleased we are that the courts did a fine job in our own family dispute. No, we would, I hope, understand that the system that may have worked for us has miserably and unjustly wounded this friend or colleague, and we would turn our care and our attention to their pain. We wouldn't insist they agree that ICBC usually gets it right, or that the judge probably had the best interests of the children in mind and got it wrong just this one time. We would simply listen, and learn, and love. And this, perhaps, is how we should listen to people whose experience of this country differs from our own.

Laying down our lives and letting other people's take precedence in the moment does not mean we have to give up our own stories and our own experiences. It doesn't mean we have to stop celebrating the many successes that our Canadian society can be rightly proud of. This was well-reflected in CBC's thoughtful Canada Day presentation that Ian Hanomansing hosted from Vancouver on July 1. Just one example was the comment of a man from the London Islamic School in Ontario, speaking about the recent vehicular murder of a Muslim family and the community's response in its aftermath. Despite occurrences of both casual and horrific acts of racism that may take place, he said "Canada is still the best country on earth and I love it to tears." But we have not yet fully lived up to the ideals we hold dear, he said. This Canada Day calls us to grow into a bigger, wiser country that has made room for diverse perspectives and wide-ranging realities.

We hear this yearning for a better, more just land in the reading from Isaiah this morning. In my Bible, this section of scripture was subtitled “Government with Justice Predicted,” and it reads as follows (note the future tense):

See, a king will reign in righteousness,  
and princes will rule with justice.

Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed,  
and the ears of those who have hearing will listen.

This is celebrating what will be when the kingdoms of earth reflect the kingdom of heaven. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer and say “Thy Kingdom come,” we must realize that God’s kingdom will not come *at all* unless it comes *for all*.

Throughout the scriptures we are given good models for serious self-scrutiny, repentance and improvement. The Old Testament prophets are constantly holding the people of Israel to account. Their deepest cultural norms – the sacrificial offerings, the rituals at the temple – all are depicted as worthless if they are not accompanied by justice and compassion. In our Christian calendar, the season of Lent is set aside as a special opportunity to reflect on the many ways we fall short of God’s dream for us. So being willing to acknowledge and address the shortcomings of our self, our country or our religious heritage is not denigrating our faith, but living into it more fully.

Our incoming priest, Helen, has just finished a one-year challenge she set herself. For 52 weeks, she chose to avoid many of her usual sources for sermon study and spent the time learning and preaching from the work of women and people of colour. She emphasized that she was not doing this in opposition to the perspectives of traditionally dominant writers, but to complement and expand upon them. While I haven’t spoken to her personally about this endeavour, her public posts attest to the freshness, excitement and vitality this has brought to her theology and thinking. Listening to others’ stories can do that for us. We all become better for it.

One of the commentators during the CBC Canada Day presentation spoke of turning reconciliation into *reconciliaction*. Although it may not feel like it, humbly listening to someone else's perspective instead of reflexively challenging it can be one of the most important actions we can take. If we all spent the year ahead committing ourselves to reading a book by an Indigenous author, listening to the Sacred Teachings podcast from the national Anglican Church, reading the TRC Calls to Action, or clicking on the links to the many Indigenous movies and podcasts in the summertime edition of *Lively Spirit*, I am confident we would emerge from the other end of the year feeling like Helen, refreshed and revitalized in our thinking. If you are looking for a place to start, our church librarian Diane or many of your fellow parishioners would be happy to offer some suggestions. It would be great to celebrate a year of collective learning when Canada Day comes around in 2022.

I will close with a prayer from the Corrymeela community near Belfast, a Christian organization first founded to work for peace and reconciliation amidst the sectarian troubles of Ireland. May it help us recognize those times we need to lay down our own life so that others may live more fully into their own.

God of the story we need to tell,  
God of the story we need to hear:  
if we only hear from one side,  
we fail to hear the fullness of your voice,  
spoken through the lives of people we think we know  
but to whom we have not listened.  
Give us courage to open our minds  
by opening our eyes and opening our ears  
to stories you are waiting to tell us,  
to stories that are already here. **Amen.**