

The gospel this morning tells us a lot about who Jesus is, and that, as God the son, he was present at the creation of all things. A few verses later, we hear about John the Baptist or as his name is translated in the Indigenous translation I read from, Gift of Goodwill. John tells us that Jesus is on the way. “The true light that shines on ALL people” was coming into the darkness of the world.

I have read there is so much theology in these first 18 verses of John’s gospel one could take months to preach on. I would like to focus on the verse I just referenced, the true light that shines on all people and the darkness could not overcome it. Today is the National Indigenous Day of Prayer. It is a time for truth telling, knowledge sharing and prayers for reconciliation in the hope that our prayers will dispel some of the darkness that still exists towards our indigenous brothers and sisters.

Even preceding Columbus, parts of North and South America were discovered by white Europeans. It was called the New World or Terra Nullus meaning no man’s land in Latin. We know very well that it was not a new world to those who had lived here for thousands of years. In 1493, Pope Alexander declared in the papal bulletin known as the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’, that any lands not inhabited by Christians were available to be discovered and that barbarous nations be overthrown or brought to the faith itself. The Church of England’s position was similar stating it was our religious duty to subdue non-Christian lands and exult the Christian faith. So as immigration proceeded westward so did persecution! Lands were seized, people were given specific areas to live in, food sources were destroyed – consider the massacre of the plain’s buffalo by governments and settlers which destroyed a major food source for indigenous peoples living in the mid-west. Indigenous nations were severely affected by measles and smallpox to which they had no immunity. The rumour still circulates today that in the late 1700’s, government officials and officials of the Hudson’s Bay company gave out blankets contaminated with the smallpox virus to West coast tribes which nearly destroyed whole communities because their way of life interfered with the fur trade.

In the residential schools, indigenous children were taken from their homes and families and forced to speak a language not their own and denied the traditions of their people. Indigenous women were forced or coerced into surgical sterilizations because some were seen as incompetent parents.

The Indian Act of 1876 exists to this day. Yes, there have been changes and amendments, but many argue it is still a racist, and sexist document. It was not until 2010 that the Anglican Church of Canada repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery as being opposed to the teachings of Jesus Christ. And it was not until 2023 that the Vatican repudiated the Doctrine, 530 years after it was issued.

We will sometimes say if I had known about this I would have objected. But I did know some of it. The last residential school closed in the 1990's. I was a grown-up adult in the 1990's and seek forgiveness for my ignorance.

Today on this day of prayer we are to focus on truth telling and reconciliation. I have shared some painful truths so now let us focus on being part of reconciliation, as we are not there yet. Our Indigenous Archbishop Christopher Harper tells us today is a day to set aside to invest in knowledge, healing, and truth telling. We are all part of God's great community of people. Brother Curtis Almquist, of the order of St. John the Evangelist tells us we need to belong to each other. In fact, we are only complete and whole as we do belong to each other. All of us are different and unique. When we question the colour of one's skin, or cultural or ethnic background, we oppose our God, who is the creator of all. It is very noble to be an activist, to wear an orange shirt, or hang out a red dress for missing or murdered indigenous women, or place small shoes at the Town Hall steps, but if our hearts are not focused on the Creator, the love He has for all of us and the love we should have for each other, it is all for not. Pray that injustices will be corrected, pray that the hearts of each of us will be changed and God will send his grace upon us and all our sisters and brothers.

Closing with a prayer Archbishop Harper included in his recent column in the Anglican Journal, let us pray:

Creator God, today we, the children of your creation, come before you with open hearts. Hear our prayer. Lift from us the clouds of confusion and despair, especially in these days of conflict. Humble us to see your peace and light, that we might walk with strength, seeking only your will. Forgive us when we speak only to hear our voice when we should be speaking for the voiceless and oppressed in our midst. Forgive us when the cost seems too daunting, and we hesitate to do what we are called to do.

Build us up to be love, forgiveness and peace, and to bless as we are blessed. Open our eyes to truth and the meaning of ministry in your church. Take our hand and guide us back to your path, for we have gotten lost in the world before us. Be our hope that we might reflect hope in all we say and do. This we pray through the Peacemaker, your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.