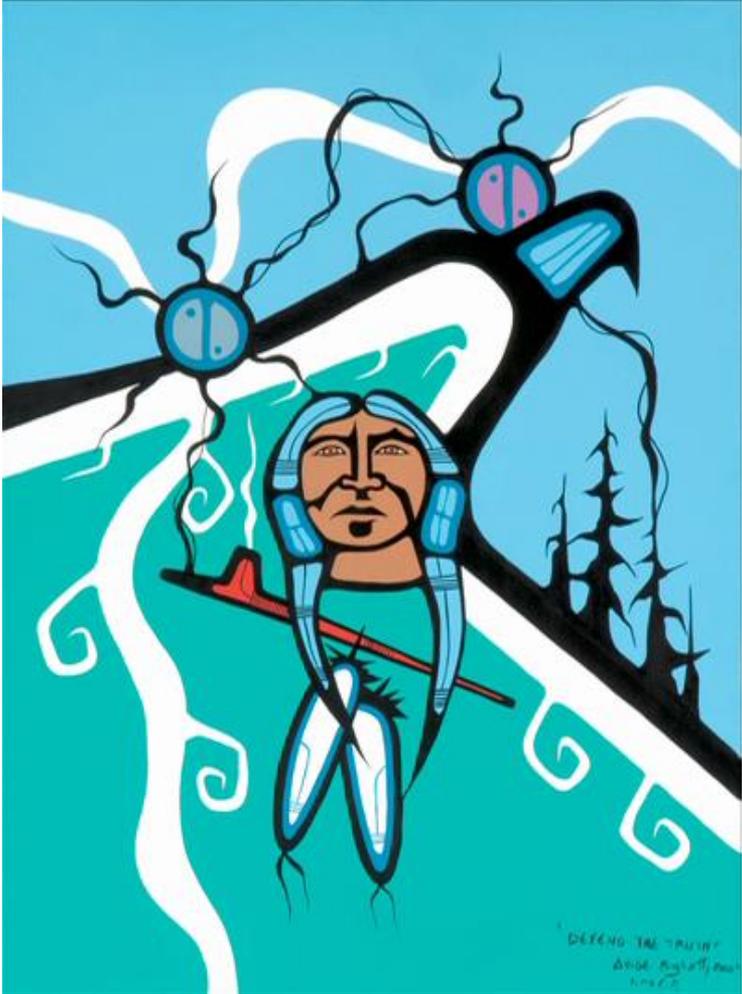


Living the Call to Reconciliation



A one week devotional series exploring Indigenous Justice

Written by Rev. Daniel Brown

Seeking Justice, Speaking Hope



Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue



The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue is a place of conversation, learning, and action on God's call to justice, peace, and reconciliation. Our goal is to “seek justice and speak hope” by presenting a positive voice of faith in Canadian public life. The Centre for Public Dialogue is a ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in Canada.

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Cover art: “Defend the Truth”

Always keep your word and defend the truth at all times; learn to speak the truth in love. Lies will twist your heart and gossip will pervert your mind. To know the truth, learn the Creator’s teachings and their truth will set you free.

Acrylic on Canvas
Painted by Ovide Bighetty
©IMCF, 2006

This painting is the tenth of twelve paintings in the series entitled “Steps Along the Red Road Following Christ the Creator.” The series is painted by Cree artist Ovide Bighetty. It was commissioned by Indian Metis Christian Fellowship (IMCF) to correspond to the 12 Steps, or Teachings, that guide life at the ministry. Each painting in the series is accompanied by a descriptive caption (in italics above).



Reconciliation, healing, and peace. Words like these permeate the existence of the Church and are a source of tremendous comfort to us as sin breaks our world. These are the things that come from God through Christ the Reconciler, the Healer, and the Peacemaker. They come at the cost of death and resurrection.

These things also come as a challenge as we follow Christ's example. The Word and the Holy Spirit tell us that we are to be reconcilers, and healers, and peacemakers in His name, especially when the sin that breaks our world belongs to us. Much of the sin perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in Canada is our sin. In our shame, as we have from the beginning, we hide ourselves from God's call.

This seven-day Bible study emerges from the question, "What is reconciliation when we, the Church, are at fault?" It is inspired by the long and painful legacy of residential schools in Canada and the fact that even today, young Indigenous children are forced to dream of equality in education.

We invite you to share with us seven days of study and prayer as we continue to seek peace, truth, and reconciliation with those whom we have wronged.

Day 1: Reconciliation

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, advocate for First Nations children and families in Canada, says, "Reconciliation means not saying sorry twice."

Amen. As Christians, we live in the reality of reconciliation, a reality that Paul describes when he tells us that God doesn't count our sins against

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

– 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

us. The plural is important because we've sinned a lot. Yet we find grace in our Saviour Jesus Christ, where forgiveness is found once and for all.

Because of this the Belhar Confession proclaims "that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwell." (The Belhar Confession came out of post-apartheid South Africa and was adopted by the CRC as an ecumenical faith declaration in 2011.)

Today we have an opportunity to live in to that calling, though it comes in the wake of sadness and the cost of our tremendous sins. Our government's apology to

Indigenous peoples in Canada is an important start to the process of reconciliation. As God's people, our calling is to ensure that no further apology is needed.

Read the Apology for the Indian Residential Schools system:

<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>.

Questions for Reflection:

Why is reconciliation so important for us? What is our message of reconciliation in this case, where we are the offending party?

Day 2: Before

Read Matthew 5:21-26

Why is reconciliation important?

Following a sermon in which I mentioned residential schools and how important it is that we participate in the process of reconciliation, I was approached by a young man. He asked me why we should pay attention to the issues of Indigenous schools and government. He didn't mean that it wasn't a worthy cause, but he wanted to know what it had to do with the gospel.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

– Matthew 5:23-24

The answer? **Everything.**

There is a hidden tragedy in Jesus' sermon that we often miss when we read these verses in Matthew's gospel, a question that needs answering: Where are your brothers and sisters? Why is it that you have to leave everything and go to find them? Shouldn't they be at the altar too?

But **they are not . . . and we're the reason** why.

We seek reconciliation in the area of Indigenous education where the church universal has played a long and damaging role. To Jesus, reconciliation is something that needs to be done before we worship -- without it, our relationship with God and with one another is incomplete.

Take time today to research residential schools in Canada and pay attention to the role that Christians have played in this painful chapter of our history. Ask yourself why reconciliation in the area of Indigenous education is not only important but imperative for the church to pursue.

Day 3: Wrong

Read Exodus 20:4-6

Researching the history of Residential Schools in Canada is a painful journey. Through it we see the Church elevating one particular race and culture as the image of God -- Indigenous people were then forced to aspire to this race-based image.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

– Exodus 20:4-6

This was wrong. We acknowledge, and understand, and condemn that...**but it isn't our fault. Why should the work of reconciliation fall to us?**

This is the challenge of our sin. It is not neat. It is not tidy. Often it leaves us cleaning up the mess of those who have long come and gone. It is not fair but it is a reality.

God's command tells us that the wrong of our parents' idolatry visits this generation. We find it visiting us in the racist systems that remain today. We find it visiting us in the severe damage that has been done to Indigenous peoples in the name of our white, Canadian idol.

The Belhar Confession states that the credibility of our message “is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity.”

Questions for reflection:

*Why is it so important that we take on the task of reconciliation?
What does the Bible promise in return?*

Day 4: Dream

Read Job 33:14-18

Shannen Koostachin of Attawapiskat First Nation had a dream...

...not of angels and demons or terrible battles and distant wars. It wasn't grotesque or filled with the ghosts and ghouls of overactive imagination. Yet in many ways it is just as terrifying.

For God does speak
– now one way,
now another –
though no one
perceives it. In a
dream, in a vision of
the night, when
deep sleep falls on
people as they
slumber in their
beds, he may speak
in their ears and
terrify them with
warnings, to turn
them from
wrongdoing and
keep them from
pride, to preserve
them from the pit,
their lives from
perishing by the
sword.

– Job 33:14-18

Shannen dreamed of safe and comfortable schools and culturally based education for all First Nations children and youth.

At first it doesn't seem like much of a nightmare -- yet in it, we stand in judgment because young aboriginal children still can only dream of going to schools with heat, let alone libraries.

The Bible tells us that dreams can serve as a wake-up call for God's people. They can remind us of our wrongdoings and our pride. They can provide us the opportunity to change course from our sins through the conscious acts of our days.

*Take time today to visit the website for
Shannen's Dream*

*(<http://www.shannensdream.ca>) and to
learn of the many ways in which our
collective wrongdoings required a young
girl to dream for us.*

*On the website are many opportunities to
direct our waking moments toward
reconciliation.*

Day 5: Silence

Read Luke 10:25-37

“A lack of political will...”

These five words are the reason that young aboriginal children still today dream of safe and comfortable schools in Canada. They are the reason that we choose bombs over blackboards and legacy projects over libraries.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

– Luke 10:31-32

It is a harsh but true reality and it exists because we remain silent. More than that – often we choose to cross the road because we don't want to get involved...

...and when we do, only as much as we have to. The school will be built in Attawapiskat because people lifted their voices, but there are over fifty more Indigenous schools just like it that need to be replaced.

Where will they be when the media loses interest in the story?

Jesus teaches us that we love our neighbours when we decide not to cross the road and when we tend to their needs where we find them, for as long as it takes. In the case of Indigenous education, the real need is political will – that we would listen and lend our voice to our neighbours.

Having seen the need of our neighbour we can follow up by lending our voice in speaking to those in power.

Take a few moments to visit the Take Action page (<http://www.fncfcs.com/shannensdream/take-action>), which provides many simple ways in which we can help.

Day 6: Fix

Read James 1:19-27

“This is an outrage! How can I help?”

The first time I was seriously introduced to the topic of Indigenous Rights and Indigenous education in Canada, I was incensed. The horrible stories, the brutal statistics, the fact that the last residential school only closed in 1996 and even worse, that it took 12 years to apologize. *How do we fix this?* I thought...and then my mind closed.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

– James 1:19-20

What happens when we move to solutions-based thinking is that we turn a conversation into a monologue. What begins as a healthy process of reconciliation becomes a quest to solve my internal angst. Sadly it is this same desire to fix problems and deal with internal conflict that caused this history that should not have happened.

This desire filled the missionary minds that sought to evangelize a lost people; the compassionate heart that needed to tame the struggles of a people in the wilderness; the paternal intellect that would solve the “Indian problem” by assimilating them into progress.

The process of reconciliation is a dangerous one because our instinct to fix when we become angry overwhelms the need to listen. James' warning is important for us to heed in this journey.

The last few devotions have suggested ways to help and it is good that we consider them - there are immediate needs that must be dealt with.

But more important to the process of reconciliation is the time of listening. Reconciliation is always found in the context of relationship and not internal dialogue.

Day 7: Tribulation

Read Revelation 7:9-17

The word “tribulation” means great trials, distress, and suffering.

When we open ourselves to the process of reconciliation and we open our ears to listen to those whom we've harmed, we find tribulation, one that is long and difficult and has been inflicted by our hand.

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

–Revelation 7:13-14

It is no wonder that, like the priests and Levites in the story of the Good Samaritan, we would want to cross the road. In the same way, it is no wonder that we might want to retreat to our own places of healing and worship, content to fix only enough to silence our own internal guilt.

However, we are called to the ministry of reconciliation – when we are wronged and especially when we are wrong. We are ambassadors of Christ and this is where his Kingdom leads.

We receive strength and comfort for this journey in the knowledge that despite the greatness of our tribulation and the stains of sin that we have left on the robes of others, we await a certain future in which the blood of Christ—the blood of

reconciliation—brings us back to the altar together in peace.

Reconciliation means facing the tribulation we have caused and seeking forgiveness and justice in the way that Christ has called us. It means listening to the cries of pain that our sin has caused and offering sincere apologies. It means building relationships at the discretion of the Indigenous Peoples who have suffered.

Shannen's Dream is only one small part of the journey of reconciliation to which we are called. To continue that journey, visit

<http://www.fncfcs.com/what-you-can-do>.