

Psalm 91:9-16  
Isaiah 53:4-12  
Mark 10 35-45  
Hebrews 5: 1-10

Osler Mennonite Church  
October 17, 2021

### **Our Inheritance: Honouring the Other**

Grace and peace to you on this beautiful Sunday morning. It is the season of post-harvest when we put away our farming equipment and gardening tools and let the land rest. Dairy and cattle producers - you do not get the same break! It is a delight to be here today. For those of you who have been in this congregation for a long time, you may remember when my father, Bernie Retzlaff, came to preach in an interim time here – probably about 20-25 years ago. Most recently Nora Pederberg and I have worked together in this past year as she studies in the area of theology and ministry. I feel a warm affinity to this congregation and am honoured to be in your midst as we worship together giving thanks to the God of mercy, compassion and justice.

As a child growing up in the valley area – I lived in Rosthern for nine years – I remember watching people in leadership, feeling a stirring to be a part of what went on in the church. At the time, all the pastors that I knew were men and so my unspoken dreams remained covered for a long time. So, what drew me to pastoral ministry: was it a status thing, a chance to be heard, a desire to speak to others about the importance of Jesus' ministry, God's love for everybody? I am sure that my motives were mixed but above all I think I wanted to serve and be of service. No doubt I had a very idealized notion of what that was. Yet, isn't that where we all begin? All of us have answered the call to serve and given leadership in many and various ways – and then living with the consequences that leadership demands.

Our scripture texts for today, hard-hitting and direct, do not mince words about the responsibility that followers of Jesus and God-bearers carry into our world. In fact, in reflecting upon these words it is inescapable that we have been gifted a certain way of being in the world because we are Jesus followers. We have inherited a manner of relating to others because we live connected to the heart of God. God's ways become our ways. None of this is news to any of you but it is a life-long challenge to love and honour "the other" as a natural way of being: our neighbour, our family member, those with whom we disagree or don't understand. We sign up to be of service, hoping to contribute, wanting our lives to make a difference. But the way is not always clear.

I don't know about you but I cringe when I hear the story of the two disciples in the Gospel reading from Mark. James and John, who despite being with Jesus throughout his ministry watching everything that Jesus does for others, witnessing his treatment of those in need; these two disciples have the chutzpah, the audacity, to ask Jesus for personal recognition, for glory. They wish to be great and expect that Jesus can grant them that status. We cringe because they get it all wrong but also are reminded of our own desire for personal recognition and prestige. And don't get me wrong, we all need to be valued for who we are and what we do, but James and John ask for an inheritance quite unrelated to the one that God has given. They seek to sit at Jesus' right and left hand, places of honour and status with the expectation that Jesus' fame will propel them to greatness.

You know where Jesus' glory takes him and it is a legacy that no one wants to live through or die for. And as this story goes the other ten disciples get their noses out of joint when they hear what the other two have been up to because they want fame and glory too. James and John try to sneak an inheritance. It is rather comical really, yet not so far from the temptations that beset us too. Greatness, glory, might and strength. Well, what makes a person great? For that matter what makes a people great or a nation great? After all is said and done, greatness has little to do with power, money, control. We find out from Jesus what it is that makes a person, a people, a nation great. It is not "lording it over" others as the NRSV translation states. Our reading uses the terms domineering and arrogant; these are not the ways of greatness. Rather greatness is compassion in service to the other, to our neighbour, to the rejected, the despised and the forgotten. It is walking alongside those who bear burdens too large to carry, those who need friendship and the essentials of life and those who need healing. It is God's way of being with all creation and so it is our way, our inheritance too. And this turns the quest for greatness on its head.

And if that is not enough let us add to this our Anabaptist inheritance that in theory is non-hierarchical. Loving the neighbour is a way of life. Modesty, equality and sharing are the things of value in community life together. Wholesome work and honesty also rank right up there as indicators of faithfulness to God. As Anabaptist Mennonites we have our heroes of the faith, servant leaders who often suffered for their stance on peace and nonviolence. Some of you have inherited the Russian Mennonite experience and the success and suffering of a people who were forced to flee under duress and to build a new life in a new place.

All of this to say that we have a wealth of stories, an inheritance that values service to others as response to God's love. And that leaves us all a little dry-mouthed when we learn of the ways in which our country, Canada has in the past interned Japanese folk, Ukrainians, people of Turkish descent, Bulgarians and others. Our governments in years past have denied freedom to these groups of immigrants during times of war. Ours is a history that includes genocidal policies that most of us are only learning of now. And, of course the most pressing social upheaval of this moment is the suffering that our Indigenous neighbours and friends are living with and the realities that we are now wrestling with as we finally stop and listen.

I know that we all have heard a lot about the recently discovered unmarked graves at former Residential School sites, the reality of the hundreds likely thousands, of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the struggle to recognize treaties, the deep divisions over building pipelines and the list goes on. I suspect that many feel distressed and on overload. I raise this current reality here today, not to berate us or to scold or demean in any way. I raise these huge local concerns because I believe that our inheritance positions us well to begin to meet the immense relationship challenge before us. What does it mean to be great, to be of service, to follow God's ways? It begins by listening to the other, to the trauma of our neighbour.

Elaine Enns and Ched Myers spoke with you all a few weeks ago and if it was similar to the sermon that I heard, they shared of memories and histories that we have found difficult to face. So, now is the time to listen and to learn, of our past and of the past of First Nations people whose ancestors lived

here before our ancestors arrived. In humility, we open ourselves to the stories of suffering that have taken place on this land and behind closed doors. I take heart from Indigenous folk themselves who have actually been of service to us in the uncovering, the revelation of a true and terrible past. Cadmus Delorme, whom you may have seen on many news stories in the last months, is Chief of Cowessess First Nation and he said this leading up to Canada Day, "I love living in Canada. I went to university. I grew up on Cowessess. I have the best job I think I ever wanted, being chief. It's not an easy task. But there is an accidental racism and ignorance in this country when it comes to history. You know, Indigenous people – and I am speaking from a Cowessess perspective – we don't want to live in our current state. We want to be part of the economy. We want to be part of the growth...the social lives...."

So my comment to everyone listening is, from Cowessess, we're not asking for pity. We're asking for understanding. We're asking that you stand beside us, that as we are gaining our control again – as Indigenous people – in our Treaty relationship, that we have better understanding....

Nobody today created the Indian Act. Nobody today created the Sixties Scoop. But we all inherited this."

We all inherited this! That offers a different perspective, at least it has done so for me. Chief Delorme is asking folks to stand with them, to listen and to understand past trauma and current tragedies, to deal with what we have all inherited and find solutions together. Too often our own feelings of shame stand in the way of our standing with others. May we move past the shame, acknowledging the truth, moving on to an inherited future together. We know how to do this.

Mary Simon, our new Canadian Governor General, stated on our first National Day of Reconciliation that “we must make reconciliation a way of life.” We know how to do this too: this way of life! And when I heard Justice Murray Sinclair say something to this effect: “reconciliation is very simple, it is about being friends.” I thought once again, we can do this too!

And Isaiah, “Yet you bore our illnesses and carried our suffering...through your wounds we are healed...All of us, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us goes our own way.” We have feared facing the truth and have caused suffering. We have not listened to the stories of deep trauma which Indigenous folks have attempted to share with us for years. We feel guilty about the past and helplessness about what transpired before our time. We have effectively dodged hearing the truth by being dismissive and hiding behind our own generational traumas. But the time has come for all that we have inherited to light a way forward. We have inherited a shared and traumatic history here in Canada. But we have also inherited a place of refuge within the heart of God, from within Creator, not as a place to hide from reality but as a source of strength in our work of seeking justice side by side.

Psalm 91 reminds us that God remains our stronghold:

“Because you love me, I will deliver you.  
I will rescue you because you acknowledge my Name.  
You will call upon me, and I will answer you;  
I will be with you in trouble; I will deliver you and honor you.  
I will satisfy you with a long life and show you my salvation.” (Ps. 91:14-16)

God shows us salvation. What does that look like? Maybe it is deliverance from racist thoughts or the inclination to exclude “the other.” Maybe salvation is grace that gives us another chance to right some of the wrongs in our communities: to experience true reconciliation. Maybe salvation is rescue from the need to feel great and powerful. Salvation is experienced in myriad ways but fundamentally it is God’s invitation to us to live God’s ways of friendship with open hearts and loving respect for all of The Creation.

Prayer: God of infinite love and caring, fill us with a fearlessness that allows us to listen carefully and as Jesus did, to stand together with those who ask this of us. Through your Spirit, grant us warm hearts that honour others in their diversity. We recognize our own need of strength and healing. In humility we look to you for courage. We pray this in your reconciling Name.  
AMEN