

SUNDAY September 28, 2025 “God Cares and We trust”

Psalm 91 | Timothy 6:6-19 Luke 16:19-31

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation also known as Orange Shirt Day occurs on September 30 and honours the children who never returned home as well as the survivors of residential schools, their families and communities. An important part of this day is the public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impact that residential schools had on the lives of First Nations people. This is a federal statutory day away from work set aside for Canadians to recognize the atrocities and multi-generational effects of the Canadian residential school system. This school system was set up by government leaders across the country which saw children removed from their homes and taken to schools many hundreds of miles away. While at the schools, the children were stripped of their identity, given numbers, wore identical clothing, experienced identical haircuts, and were subject to many situations of abuse, lack of medical care and in many instances death...There were 140 federally operated residential schools that operated in Canada from 1867 to 1996. Under the direction of the federal government, Roman Catholic (44), Anglican (21), Presbyterian (2) and United Churches (15) operated these schools with the idea of assimilation teaching their ideal of what society should be discounting the First Nation traditions and cultures.

A part United Church history includes a long term involvement through the funding and operations of these Indian Residential Schools under the amendments to the Indian Act. During this time, there were many abuses, lost childhoods and deaths of innocent children. Every Child Matters is a slogan and message used to honour innocent lives lost. Every child is important, including the ones who lost their lives and the adults who are still healing from their difficult time at residential schools.

In the intervening years since the closure of these residential schools, the United Church provided its records to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) which aids in ensuring access for the purpose of historical research and reconciliation efforts. The United Church continues to engage in reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples in Canada, acknowledging the devastating impact of colonialism.

As we gather to worship today we take a step back and look at where our power lies and how the gap between powerful and powerless seems to widen. When we reflect on Psalm 91 we cannot help but envision the eagle in flight. The eagle is revered by many First Nations

people as having spiritual power. It is sacred because it flies closest to the creator and symbolizes respect, honour, strength courage and wisdom. In the psalmist's description we also experience the transformative and saving power of God. God will hold us and protect us, just like we are each called to do with each other. It is this saving power of God that we each need to experience anew as we strive to build the bridges which we encounter.

Jesus tells a parable which illustrates the division of power between people as found in Luke 16. He describes a rich and a poor man. The rich man is unnamed but dressed in the finest clothing like royalty and was gluttonous in his eating habits. The poor man is named Lazarus. However he is not to be confused with another Lazarus whom Jesus raised from death and Mary and Martha's brother. This Lazarus was poor, sick and covered with sores, homeless and longed for any scraps of food which might fall from the tables of the rich. Dogs comforted him by licking his sores but his life was rough.

In time, both men died and were carried to their eternal resting place. The poor man was carried by the angels to be with Abraham, his father in faith. But the rich man was tormented in Hades. And from there he saw that Lazarus was with Abraham and sought mercy. He wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to refresh him because he was in agony in the flames. But it is what Abraham shares with him catches our attention.

He states, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things and at the same time Lazarus received evil things? But he is comforted here and you are in agony." The great chasm is fixed such no one may pass from here to there or there to here. The rich man then begs Abraham for Lazarus to visit his family to warn them so that they will not end up with him.

Abraham does not get Lazarus to go, but reminds the rich man that his family has Moses and the prophets to whom they should listen. The rich man counters stating, "But if someone goes from the dead to then they will repent. "Yet the story concludes with Abraham saying, "If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

So what did Jesus mean by this? This passage teaches that heaven and hell/hades exist. But we don't often talk about this uncomfortable topic because like many people today there is a complacency about being everything is great and that there is no concern about

whether they will go to heaven. Because that's where everyone will end up. Isn't it? Everyone is good aren't they?

This parable illustrates what became known by the rich man- he was in hell and there was no way to get to heaven. He knew what his earthly life was like. He knew Lazarus as the beggar in the street by his house and that he was ill and that he barely had food. But he had not done anything to help him. Then when he saw that Lazarus was with Abraham and there was no more pain or suffering for him, he wanted to change. But this was not possible.

Our understanding is that when believers die, they are in the conscious fellowship and joy of heaven. The rich man wanted this too- but he knew why he was not there. He merely now sought to be comforted and to forewarn his brothers of what has happened to him. He wanted them to be reconciled with God and have them live according to God's teachings of caring for others so that they will go to heaven upon their death. He knew that he was eternally separated from God and there was no hope of ever mitigating his sorrow, pain or suffering. And part of this suffering would include recounting those times when he did not help another person or live out the teachings of love for one another.

Jesus points out that it was not a mystery as to where one goes when they die. This man knew God's teachings, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had been raised in the faith - yet did not live it out in his daily living. He was rich, proud, and sinful in many ways. Yet what we might understand from this story is still happening now. The rich are richer and the poor are poorer and the gap widens.

As we reflect on the Indian Residential School systems, there were huge divisions about what was actually occurring to what was perceived; just as what we see in our cities across the country-- on the streets and in the malls and shopping areas. Yet what might we do?

We know that every child matters; every person is a child of God- created in His image; so why do we do this to other people? Why do people hurt people? Maybe it is because we too are hurt? Maybe it is because the messages of Moses and the prophets are not known or shared. OR even the message of Jesus Christ is not clear- we are called to love one another. But not everyone is able or willing. How much effort does it take to care a little bit? Maybe it is time to stop complaining and criticizing what is wrong and start to building bridges in new ways.

Jesus said, "I am the way, truth and life; I have come that you might have life more abundantly and that no one comes to the father but by me." As Christians, Jesus' followers in faith, we are the ones who believe and belong to communities of faith which care and share and show love. We are the ones who are called to be bridges not only with the First Nations of our country through lifting up the 94 Calls to Action recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And we are the ones who are called to be the bridge of faith so that people will believe and not end up like the rich man in agony for eternity.

The rich man knew God's teachings through Moses and the prophets but lived life his own way. We have been taught the new commandment of Jesus Christ-- to love one another as he loves. But, we do not always do so. We might say that the problems existing right now are too big for one person alone, and they are. Yet if we become a part of those who seek Christ's love and offer hope in new ways, we are a bridge to a better future for all. Faith is the Bridge between not knowing and still choosing to Trust.

We belong to God- as part of the God's family we call the church. We believe in Jesus our Saviour who taught us to love one another. We are the bridge that will unite people if we offer our hand to help others with the hope that all may be one. This is who we are; united in heart and in faith and with hope. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

Holy God of grace and love we praise you that every child matters to you and that we should care and love others as you taught. Help us O God to bridge this gap and fill it with hope and love. Inspire us anew and come to our hearts so that we will walk in the way of Christ. Amen.