

SUNDAY, September 29, 2024 "Lend Me Your Voice"

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22 James 3:13-4:3, 7-8 Mark 9:38-50

Have you ever experienced laryngitis- that is the inability to speak out loud which enables your voice to be heard by others? Laryngitis is an inflammation of the voice box (larynx) that causes your voice to become raspy or hoarse. Most of the time, laryngitis comes on quickly and lasts as long as 2 weeks. It is caused by overuse, irritation, or infection of the vocal cords inside the larynx. Other causes are due to a cold, influenza (flu), or allergies. Loud talking, shouting, cheering, or singing also can cause laryngitis. IF you've ever experienced this it may be quite frustrating as another person may not hear you nor understand what you are trying to say. Your message is lost and people ignore you unless you get their attention in other ways.

The inability to speak up is different because of situations in which people find themselves unable to be heard. Speaking up may also make others uncomfortable until stories are shared and truth is known.

This is the case of Esther. During the reign of King Xerxes his wife, Queen Vashti is banished from the court for disobeying the king's orders. To find a new queen, a beauty pageant is held and Esther, a young Jewish woman is chosen as the new queen. However, her Jewish identity is hidden from the king until such time that Haman, an advisor to the King, plans to kill all of the Jewish people in the empire. However, Mordechai a Jewish leader and cousin-uncle to Esther, discovers this plan and he urges Esther to use her position as queen to intervene and save their people. Esther is hesitant about revealing her Jewish identity to the king but does so and begs for mercy for her people. Haman's plot is exposed and she convinces the king to spare the Jews. The Jewish festival of Purim is established to celebrate the victory of the Jews of the First Persian Empire over their enemies, and Esther becomes a heroine of the Jewish people. Esther spoke up for her people and the King listened to her saving them from death.

But how often do we speak up for others?

Tomorrow September 30 is the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation when we are to take time to learn about those who could not speak, or did not speak up about Indigenous rights and the legacy of the Residential School system. This program took first nations children from their homes to have in Residential schools far from their homes 10/12 of the year. At these schools, they lost their identity, culture, and many children lost innocence and life. Yes, the intention of Residential Schools was good- universal education for every child, but assimilation and the manner of breaking home relationships was not felt or articulated until years later.

We may not know individuals who are survivors, but learning about what they experienced is an onerous task for all Canadians. We can say, o that's too bad and move on. But for some of these adults, the horrors and trauma experienced continue as their stories are told again to the next generation. Yes they are recognizing that things are changing. But we must remember that the government wanted everyone to be educated and they counted on the churches to do this. (RCatholic, Anglican and United). Education was the desired outcome, put how to implement this was the downfall for many of these institutions. As those in leadership often led impure lives, or did not even know them or welcome them as individuals.

This process of Truth and Reconciliation has been long and continues to be enacted as information emerges and stories are shared. This National Day of T&R is intended to raise awareness of the individual, family and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of "Every Child Matters". The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations. As we learn more, we hear other voices-- Phyllis Webstad- whose orange shirt story inspired us to wear orange and be bold about who we are. People within the UCC, who are now on the path of developing their own Indigenous Council as well as people who seek clean water, fresh air and the ability to teach their children their culture and identity. And when one voice speaks we must listen.

Jesus' teaching in Mark 9 seems so violent and harsh- if your hand, foot, eye cause you to sin- cut it off or tear it out. But what Jesus is stating is that if a part of us as individuals leads us to not respect or protect God's image in ourselves and neighbours, something definitely is wrong. And the stories of Residential School survivors are stories where there was much pain and sorrow. But as Jesus states, "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have 2 eyes and be thrown into hell- where fire continues."

We were created in God's image and as such Jesus is calling us to remember to whom we belong. We are people of hope, life eternal and the promise of resurrection. When we consider the atrocities of what people are experiencing in the world's history and today we might wonder what happened? You might recall images of concentration camps, injustices of women-men, as well as the end of each war showing no winners. And each of these may be glimpses of hell on earth. What Jesus is saying is this, you are better than this! You are children of God, created to love and serve Him, you are my followers in faith and you know that you are not alone in this world. You have been given gifts of emotion, education and knowledge. So why not

speak up? You have temporary laryngitis when it comes to not using your voice as we seek justice and resist evil.

In a few minutes we will join our voices together and sing “with VOICES UNITED” our praises, thanksgiving and even confess those things we are afraid to share as we seek God’s blessings. WE need to remember what we do and why we do it. For if we are uncertain, what are we called to be and do? Are we willing to be like Christ? Created in God’s image? Ready to serve? Or will we sing God’s praises when convenient or have temporary laryngitis when others need a voice? Will we confess our sins as followers of Jesus, praying for forgiveness and seeking a new path and new role of what we are called to do? Or will we claim that we don’t know him?

Queen Esther risked her life for the sake of her Jewish family and as a result Haman was hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai, and, on the day planned for their annihilation, the Jews destroyed their enemies. The feast of Purim was established to celebrate that day of Esther saving her people.

As we learn more about The 94 Calls to Action (CTAs) as presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the healing process will take time and manifest themselves in two ways: acknowledging the full, horrifying history of the residential schools system, and creating systems to prevent these abuses from ever happening again in the future. As voices are shared, we will listen and dare not repeat this again.

Jesus also states that we can also have peace with each other. But how? How might this occur? Jesus taught his disciples that we need to have salt as a means of preserving who we are. He states that even though we are His followers, we will lose saltiness when we compromise with the world or learn to love its ways. Instead of being different by remaining godly and faithful to him, we may be lead to a love for wealth, fame, luxury or pleasure may lead to a loss of saltiness. So be salty and have peace amongst yourselves.

There are many factions and groups seeking your attention and support, but what is essential is that you stay true to who you are and what you might do. Use your voice but remember who you are: a child of God, a faithful follower of Jesus Christ who is guided by the Spirit. Amen.

## PRAYER

Holy God of grace and love we praise you and thank you for Jesus' teaching of living life fully in your care and guidance. Hear our prayers as we offer them to you SILENCE.

Enable us to lend our voice to the purpose of Christ Jesus our saviour and lord. Amen