

# St James United Church

Message for October 2, 2022  
Orange Shirt Sunday and Worldwide Communion



“Living in Remembrance”  
- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Readings: Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4; Luke 16:19-31; *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson

Thank you choir for a lovely anthem. “This Do in Remembrance of Me” names a big part of what we’re doing today, the sacrament of communion connecting us to the night before Jesus’ death, which despite the plan of his accusers, amplified his ministry of liberation. And though we think of that meal in relation to Jesus, he and his disciples were remembering an earlier night, when God, through the ministry of Moses, led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. We need to remember that on this Worldwide Communion Sunday. Jesus’ invitation to share communion in his memory is tied to more than just a last supper but to every meal he shared, often with those considered by others as unworthy before God. As such they became meals of liberating love.

Those meals are the backdrop of Jesus’ parable of an unnamed wealthy person and Lazarus. We are used to his stories, forgetting that like meals he shared with the “unworthy”, his parables were intended to shock his listeners into action. If his accusers had told it, the wealthy person would be the one named and not Lazarus. The poor were customarily overlooked and when paid attention to viewed as a morality tale, the dominant view being that they deserved their lot, their illness, poverty, disability or other circumstance, proof they must have sinned and so unworthy to be considered as children of Abraham. In meal and parable, Jesus upended those assumptions.

If we’re honest, those assumptions still need upending, especially because, despite our being in a cost-of-living crisis, we are the beneficiaries of those assumptions, more privileged than many in the world. How? Because our ancestors, many claiming to follow Jesus, considered anyone who didn’t look like them, act like them, worship like them, as unworthy before God, and so as unworthy of the lands where God had placed them, at least not until they became like them.

That’s what we remember each Orange Shirt Day, Indigenous children taken from their families and communities and sent to residential schools to “change them”, to quote Duncan Campbell-Scott, the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932: “to get rid of the Indian problem..., to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic.” But unlike boarding schools for white children, these chronically underfunded and overcrowded schools were more work camps and religious seminaries than schools, where, as today’s children’s story reminds us, students were culturally and spiritually abused, and more than that, experienced verbal, physical and sexual abuse as well. And when these

students returned home, they were unable to get the healing they needed because the cultures and traditions that would have helped them had been too eroded by colonialism. So the trauma continued in individual and family dysfunction, unresolved grief, family violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism and other substance abuse, mental health issues, community breakdown.

I wish that was where the history ended but intergenerational impacts are present today. And not from a lack of trying on the part of Indigenous communities. In fact, what I have listed is not the whole story. I know many people from many different nations who are healthy and helping their communities to heal. But in many ways we're like the wealthy person in the parable, refusing to let go of their privilege and calling on Lazarus for help despite their history. Even though anyone faced with such trauma would end up doing much the same, rather than offer compassion many Canadians see the poverty, violence and addiction that impacts Indigenous peoples both on and off reserve as proof that Indigenous peoples are somehow "unworthy of God". So our leaders craft new policies based on old ideas, leading to more children in foster care than at any time in residential schools, a higher percentage of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in prisons relative to population, hesitance to fund needed infrastructure, economic development, healing programs, and so blocking ways to help Indigenous peoples liberate themselves from a colonial legacy that hurts us all. And so the people rightly echo Habakkuk: "O God, how long will I call for help and you not listen? I cry out, 'Violence!' but you don't deliver us...Your Word has failed."

It failed because all this was done by those claiming to follow Jesus, and will continue to unless we as their descendants go beyond claims and discover what Jesus really stood for. I pray that as we do, we'll draw on the grace we celebrate every time we share communion so that we can confront the assumptions that created this legacy and with open hearts start walking the road of reconciliation. Thankfully I see just that as non-Indigenous allies increasingly rally in support of survivors of Residential Schools, coming out in greater numbers than last year following the discovery of unmarked graves. On Friday, Glen and I joined three hundred plus at Pippy Park Courtyard for a prayer release ceremony. It was heartening to see such numbers in just one of many events across the country. Now we need to go beyond one day a year, listening to the experiences of Indigenous peoples with openness not defensiveness; rather than judge cultural practices, religious beliefs and languages as our ancestors did, seeing them as a gift from God; standing with Indigenous siblings in the push to have implemented all the TRC Calls to Action and the Calls to Justice of the MMIWG Inquiry Report. When we do, we will help bridge the parable's chasm, and in the process, find we're sitting in God's liberating and loving embrace.

Today we celebrate communion not just as a congregation but with faith communities around the world. Sharing this way celebrates that we're one people across many nations. Important as this is globally, I believe it needs to be lived out locally, including in solidarity with Indigenous nations. As we do, we participate in Jesus' ministry of liberation remembered in communion. May we live that remembrance, helping heal the past by how we live in the present. Amen.