

St James United Church



Message for September 28, 2025 Truth and Reconciliation Sunday

“Walking Together on the Road” - Preached by Canon Tom Mugford

Micah 6:6-8; and Luke 24:13-35

Good morning, friends. Thank you for being here, on this sacred day - the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day. A day to remember the children who never came home. A day to honour the survivors and former students who carry the scars in body and spirit. A day to tell the truth, and to commit to walking together toward healing.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the Land we are on. Not just as a formality, but as a way of grounding ourselves in relationship. This Land remembers. It has held the footsteps of children taken too soon. It has carried the prayers of Elders, whispered in the wind. Long before churches and towns were built, this Land carried the ceremonies and songs of Indigenous Peoples - in Inuktitut, in Mi'kmaq, in Innu-aimun, in so many languages. We are guests here. Always.

As an Indigenous person and a follower of Jesus, I carry many stories. Some of them are stories of grief: of schools that took children away; of churches that forgot how to love; of languages silenced and ceremonies forbidden. But I also carry stories of strength: of parents and grandparents who prayed; of aunts and uncles who hunted and sang; of communities who never gave up. And today, as we gather in worship, I bring all those stories with me. And I offer them to you, in the spirit of covenant, in the spirit of truth, and in the hope of reconciliation.

Our Gospel reading comes from Luke 24 - the Walk to Emmaus. Two people are walking a long road. They are grieving. Their teacher, Jesus, has died. And then, someone joins them. They don't know who it is yet, but it is Jesus, walking beside them. He listens. He speaks. And only later, when bread is broken and shared, do they recognize him.

This story reminds me of our own walk, as Indigenous Peoples, and as churches and faith communities. For a long time, many walked beside us, but did not truly see us. And because of that, did not recognize Jesus within us. They did not see our knowledge as theology. They did not see our languages as sacred. They did not see our dignity as equal in God's eyes.

But the Gospel teaches us something holy: we recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread. Not in power. Not in policy. But in brokenness. In sharing. In presence. This, I believe, is the heart of reconciliation. It is not just about saying “sorry.” It is about walking together. Listening. Making space. And yes, turning over the tables of exclusion so that all may share the bread of Grace.

Now some of you might be wondering: What can we do? How do we honour this day as Christians? Let me offer three thoughts.

First, we must listen deeply.

Not only to news stories or history books. But to Indigenous voices, to Survivors, to Elders, to the truths that have been carried for generations.

Second, we must walk humbly.

The prophet Micah says: "What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Walking humbly means knowing we do not have all the answers. It means being willing to be changed by what we hear, and by who we meet.

Third, we must act with love.

Not just with good intentions, but with action:

- Supporting Indigenous-led ministries and initiatives.
- Learning the local Land and language names.
- Making space for Indigenous leadership in our churches and institutions.

Reconciliation is not a destination. It is a journey. And it is not a journey we take alone. The Spirit walks with us. The Creator walks with us. And if we truly walk together - with honesty, with patience, with love - we may just find Jesus walking beside us too.

Let me end with a story. There is an Inuit tradition of the *Kullik*, an oil lamp made of stone. In the coldest months of winter, the *Kullik* was the source of light and warmth. But when the flame burned low, you didn't throw the lamp away. You tended the wick. You added fuel. You kept it burning. That, to me, is the work of Truth and Reconciliation. It is tending the flame. When the flame of justice burns low - we don't give up. When the flame of healing flickers - we tend it. When the flame of truth feels heavy - we keep it alive, not only for ourselves, but for the generations yet to come.

So, on this National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, let us tend the flame.

Let us walk together.

Let us honour the Land.

Let us honour the Survivors, and the children who never came home.

Let us recognize the sacred in one another.

And let us live as people of covenant, of kinship, and of Jesus Christ.

Nakummek (Thank you)

Amen.