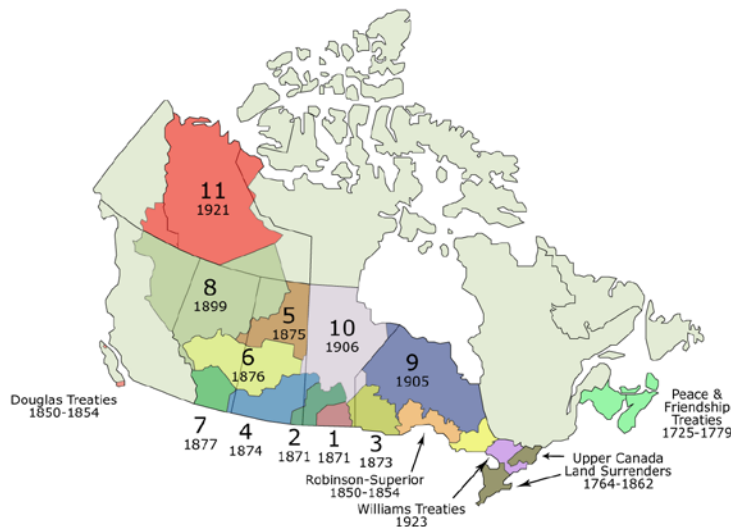


7 February 2021
Matthew 5:43-48; 2
Corinthians 5:11-21
Reconciliation with Others
First Mennonite Church

Today is the last sermon in the series on reconciliation is the centre of our work. At its core, reconciliation has to do with **restoring relationships**.

Reconciliation is the bringing together of persons, ideas, or perspectives that have been in conflict. Reconciliation assumes that at one time fellowship existed; however, an offense took place that brought about estrangement and perhaps hostility, which needs to be resolved.¹ In our 4-part series we explored reconciliation with God, reconciliation with ourselves, and reconciliation with creation. Today, our focus is on reconciliation with others.



In part of the introduction to this morning's theme, Heidi acknowledged the land we live on. This land that we live on and share with numerous indigenous peoples is known as treaty 6 territory. She acknowledged the land in the spirit of reconciliation.

In the last number of years, territorial acknowledgment has become a common thing to do at the beginning of public gatherings. But, why do this in church? This morning, I want to share with you three vignettes from my spiritual journey that have changed me, transformed me to the point where a territorial acknowledgment is but a tiny step of living into right relations with Indigenous peoples.

¹ Becker Palmer, Anabaptist Essentials: Ten Signs of a Unique Christian Faith, pg 111



Courtesy of J. H. Cranston, Esq.

The Martyrdom of Brébeuf and Lalemant

My **first vignette** comes from my childhood. In Winkler MB, where I grew up, almost everyone looked like me—a Russian Mennonite. Of course, there were different shades of Mennonites too—the Sommerfeld’s, the Chortizer’s, the Old Colony, the Mennonite Brethren, and me, a Bergthaler Mennonite. Just to be clear, Bergthaler Mennonite’s in MB are different than the Bergthaler Mennonite’s here in SK. There was also a small—somewhat exotic community of German

Lutherans. The community has changed a lot over the years, but growing up, that was about it. There were no indigenous people around, yet I can remember not having a favourable impression of them. I won’t bother repeating the things I heard about indigenous people as a child, because I suspect all of you heard similar things. Of all the negative things said about indigenous people, one very vivid memory has stayed with me all these years. It was a drawing—this one from my grade 6 Canadian history class. It shows 2 European Jesuit missionaries, Brébeuf and Lalemant, being burnt to death while a crowd of angry, half-naked, bloodthirsty Iroquois are yelling and screaming.

Briefly, Brébeuf was a Jesuit missionary who came to Canada in 1625 to begin ministry among the Huron near Georgian Bay, in what it today, Ontario. Brébeuf not only learnt the Huron language and preached to the Huron people, but he was also an accomplished linguist, and supervised the preparation of a Huron grammar and dictionary.

In 1647, the French and the Iroquois made a peace treaty. The Iroquois and Hurons were competitors in the fur trade and bitter rivals. Between 1648–50 the Iroquois and Hurons fought. At one point, The Iroquois destroyed Huron villages

and missions. They seized Brébeuf and his fellow missionary Gabriel Lalemant and tortured them to death.²

I don't remember anything about that grade 6 history class other than this one disturbing drawing. It has stayed with me all these years. But it encapsulates all the disturbing things I heard about indigenous people growing up.

Is reconciliation possible when my only real connection with indigenous people is this drawing?

A second and profoundly transformational vignette comes from my reading and understanding of the Gospel, specifically, Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth. Apparently, Paul's first letter hadn't solved all the problems of this dysfunctional congregation, so a second one was required. There were three church-threatening problems which Paul addressed: moral laxity, unwillingness to accept the teachings of the church, and endless bickering between those who followed the teachings of Apollos and those who followed the teachings of Peter.

Sounds like Christians today!

Trying to bring some order to the chaos, Paul reminded them they were the body of Jesus in the world. Paul reminded them of who they were—followers of Jesus. Paul reminded them that their identity was no longer defined by their old natures, but in Christ they were part of a new one—a new creation. All the old divisions could be overcome.

Listen to Paul's words:

From now on we regard no one from the human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

Interesting that these early Christian quarrellers who were used to seeing each other as business folks, teachers, environmentalists, male, female, new age leftists, staunch conservatives who refused to change—were now invited **not to regard each other from the human point of view any more.**

This, Paul says, is the simple requirement for becoming reconciled. So, how should they regard one another? Let's read on.

² <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/jean-de-brebeuf>

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Think about that for a moment. Is it actually true that in Christ everything has become new? Cast your glance around this room—what do you see? A new creation? Cast your glance wider to other denominations, wider still to those on 20th street, or even further to your enemies. What do you see? A new creation? How are you looking? From a human point of view? With the eyes of faith?

If we're honest, then we're more like those Corinthian Christians than we'd care to admit. They were also shocked when hearing this letter read. Everything has become new? This is humanly impossible. It's an exaggeration. We're still human. It's unrealistic. It's simply not true. We are simple ordinary folks, we're weak, we're imperfect. We're not even that smart. The Apostle Paul would have completely agreed with the objectors. Your right, this is humanly impossible.

Listen to how he continues.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul had this incredible notion that the Spirit of the living God could transform, reconcile, fear and hate-filled human beings. **What is not humanly possible is possible with God.**

When we look at each other through the eyes of Christ we see each other differently. Then we look with forgiveness and not revenge, then we look with submission to the truth and not with self-defence, then we look with graciousness and not with jealousy, then we look with the hope to unit all of humankind under the love of God and not with the aim to divide and conquer. Then we look with humility and not with arrogance, with sensitive care and not with manipulative power. Through God, says Paul, we can be reconciled to one another today because God does not count our trespasses against us. God forgives us and thereby disempowers that which divides us against one another. Through God we are set free to live in a whole new reality, holy and united in mind and in deed. Through God we will be able to take care of each other's needs. Through God we can pursue reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters.

In the NT, the message of reconciliation was preached both to the Jews and to the Gentiles. In fact, the church at Corinth was probably largely gentile. They are the product of having been included in the message of peace and reconciliation. The

Gospel message is not reserved only for a select few, it is for the entire world. There is but one covenant and it is between God and all the peoples of this world. As the Apostle says to another church congregation in Rome,

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him” (10:12)

and to another church in Ephesus,

For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both Jews and gentiles into one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between them (3: 14).

We live in a one covenant world. We believe in one God for all peoples. As members of a community of Christ followers, we have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation to **all those around us**, not only to a few or those whom we like. No one can be excluded. It is therefore appropriate for our congregation to be represented in many different parts of our society. Our task is to be Christians wherever we are.

A final vignette from my spiritual journey that leads me to the point where land acknowledgments are important step in our reconciliation with indigenous peoples, comes not from my work with indigenous people but from my work in Asia. How do we work at creating the space, creating the conditions for God’s Spirit to work and peace and reconciliation to take root and flourish? I have so many stories I could share, but I will restrict myself to one.

When I lived in Taiwan in the 1980s, I was given the opportunity to spend 2 weeks in the Philippines participating in a MCC-sponsored Asia Mennonite Youth work camp. The hosts in the Philippines were a group of Filipino Mennonite congregations. In addition to my spouse I and a couple of MCC workers, there were Mennonite young people from the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and India.

Our task was simple: we were to work together to build a basketball court in this one small village. While it was called a basketball court, the reality was that it would be used for a variety of activities, including village meetings, community get-togethers, and of course, basketball. Since it was the only place in the village that had a large concrete surface, the basketball court would also be used by local farmers to dry their rice. A multi-purpose sheet of concrete.

Every morning all of us walked together from where we stayed to the construction site, and once there, worked together on this project. When we walked to the construction site, we talked, and then when we worked together, we talked some

more. I got to know many people from all over Asia during those days. In the afternoon, when it was much too hot and humid to work, we had bible studies and visited local areas of interest. Then in the evenings, we shared stories, sang and worshipped in a group, and had more conversation. We also ate together, which provided even more time to share conversation around food. Before the pandemic, these were all very ordinary activities people anywhere around the world do when they are together.

If you've ever spent any time with Filipinos, you will know how much they love to tell stories. We were showered with stories. Stories of hope. Stories of struggle. Funny stories. Sad stories. The Filipinos told a lot of stories from WWII, when Japan occupied large areas of the country. We were taken to houses that Japanese soldiers had taken over during the war and were told stories about the soldiers. They told these stories as if these events happened yesterday. There was no anger, hatred or malice evident in their stories, but rather stories of what happened in their village long ago.

The Japanese participants heard these stories. One evening when we were all together, the two Japanese participants stood up and apologized to the Filipinos and to the other participants whose countries had been at war with Japan in WWII.

And what happened next, I can only describe as God's Spirit moving, God's Spirit rushing in like that mighty wind did in Acts 2 so long ago. People stood up and embraced the two Japanese. There were tears, words of comfort, expressions of forgiveness, and lots of hugging. At that moment God's peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding, the vision of a new creation which Paul talks about here in 2 Corinthians, invaded our space, took root and sprouted.

A holy moment.

The Mennonites who envisioned this work camp worked for MCC in S. Korea in the 1950s and early 1960s. Living there, they heard the words of pain and hatred, felt and experienced the hatred of the Korean people towards the Japanese for the brutal Japanese invasion and colonisation of Korea in the early part of the 20th century. Living in Asia for 16 years, I can't tell you how many times I heard the Chinese say horrible things about the Japanese. How does one work at reconciliation when there is so much animosity, fear, and hatred of one people towards another? So, these MCC workers drafted a project that would bring Koreans and Japanese together to work on a common project together. When Kathi and I attended this work camp in the 1980s it had expanded to include Mennonites from around Asia. But the basic goal remained the same. The goal

was to bring people—often times enemies—together so that they could work together, eat together, share their lives with each other, and get to know one another.

This isn't rocket science, folks. All the work at planning this work camp, all the travel plans, all the food preparation, all the logistics—all of these things **simply helped create the space, helped create the conditions where God's reconciling Spirit could work in the minds and hearts of the participants to bring about reconciliation.**

Acknowledging the land upon which we live is a simple act. Having someone say it Sunday morning isn't suddenly going to break down the barriers of mistrust, fear and hate between us and indigenous peoples. The work of reconciliation with others that Jesus calls us to is difficult and may last generations. A quick read of the 94 recommendations in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report will give you an idea of how difficult and long-lasting this could be. Yet, by acknowledging the land upon which we live over and over with a sincere heart, a right spirit, then maybe, just maybe God's Spirit may work within us to remove those blinders that are on our eyes preventing us from really seeing our Indigenous neighbours. Maybe then we'll no longer **regard each other from the human point of view** but see others as God's children. Then when we look, we'll no longer see this picture



Courtesy of J. H. Cranston, Esq.

The Martyrdom of Brébeuf and Lalemant



but this one. God, may it be so. Amen.

Hereditary chief George Kingfisher, left, and Mennonite landowner Ray Funk chat during a scene in the documentary film, Reserve 107, about land rights in Saskatchewan.