

Text: John 5: 1-9

Sermon Title: Social healing: Synod 2019

Rev. Sharon Smith

Healing is most often a process and not a moment.

Healing of the body and mind, takes time, may need medical care and even so, has no guarantees.

In the church, I have been a witness to desperate cries to God, to take away physical illness, mental anguish, and pain. I have witnessed disappointment, I have witnessed momentary relief, But mostly I have seen the wonder of people coming around each other to bear the burden of what one person cannot carry alone.

And not many in our society have the kind of relational support we have been blessed with.

For in the context of illness and pain there are other types of healing that are also necessary.

For healing in its most profound sense refers to the multilayered restoration of body, mind, spirit, relationships and societies.

In John's account of a miracle story – Jesus approaches a man with a chronic, life long illness.

“Do you want to be made well?”

The man replies with a perplexing response - for it is about more than his body...

He responds:

“Sir I have no one...”

And

“Someone else steps in ahead of me”

Both social realities.

One of loneliness. And one of inequality of opportunities.

It interests me that the author of John's gospel embeds this story into an intense debate between Jesus and the religious leaders about healing on Holy Days.

Where the power of one group is being abused to make rules that exclude a man who lies alone, from being helped on Sabbath Days, when the second Jerusalem Temple nearby had more visitors than other days.

Power is an insidious disease that seeps into each of us.

And it can be oh so subtle.

- It can look like helping or charity or taking care of the values of a community when in actual fact by being in the role of doing for others, we actually keep them in a helpless position.

I wonder what would have happened if Jesus turned to the religious leaders of the first century and asked:

“Do **you** want to be made well?”

Would they have recognised that something was indeed wrong?

How many of us walk through life not even knowing that we are the ones in need of relational healing?

And even when the Spirit’s light exposes these patterns of unintentional power abuse, we are not ready to let them go.

I have often pondered the question: What is this doing **for** me? My ego, my sense of worth... And I often don’t ask: what it is doing **to** me or what is it doing **to** others?

- Preventing mutual friendship and respect.
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Archbishop Desmond Tutu is known to have said during the years of South African apartheid: *In dehumanizing others, they are themselves dehumanized. Perhaps oppression dehumanizes the oppressor as much as, if not more than, the oppressed. They need each other to become truly free, to become human. We can be human only in fellowship, in community, in koinonia, in peace.*

For in the process of relational healing – everyone is need.

We have seen this in Northern Ireland between the Catholics and Protestants;

We have seen this in Rwanda between the Twa, Hutu’s and Tsutsi’s, or more correctly because of Germany and Belgium colonization;

We have seen this in Germany between East and West,

We have seen this in Croatia between the Serbs and the Croats;

We have seen this in New Zealand between Maori and Westerners.

We see this here in Canada between those of us who have immigrated here, settled and First Nations Peoples.

We are all in need of healing.

Over the last two days Pip, Brenda, Monica, Jessica and I attended our Diocesan Synod.

Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, The most reverent Fred Hiltz addressed us on the self-determining indigenous church.

The original aim of indigenous Christian leaders was to build an indigenous church within the Anglican Church of Canada – especially since the 1994 Covenant (see appendix).

Self-determination has grown.

That is the process of honouring and respecting the identity of the indigenous church

The healing process of the legacy of colonialism where the church was complicit with national government assimilation.

He reminded us that healing is a process.

In 1993 the church made an apology for the wrongs committed (see appendix).

But like any relationship. After an apology, there is work to be done.

For once an apology is made the offended party needs space to heal to grow trust again.

And once an apology is made the offender needs to step back and ask the question: How do I need to change and behave differently?

Archbishop Hiltz said we need to live into our apology.

We need to continue the long journey.

The indigenous church needs its own place to enculturate the gospel of Christ in local authentic ways.

Under the amazing leadership of Bishop Mark Macdonald and 11 other bishops – after general Synod 2019 we could see the formation of a truly indigenous national church with Bishop Mark MacDonald as Archbishop.

Where the continuation of the healing journey will see equal power, full respect, and growing trust.

They want to be made well.

On Friday at Synod - Our own Diocese of New Westminster had an opportunity to live into our apology locally. To move into our own process of healing.

A motion was put to the floor of Synod which read:

“That is a gesture of restitution and reconciliation guided by our baptismal covenant, the Five Marks of Mission, the biblical jubilee, and our diocesan commitments to Indigenous justice; Synod requests Diocesan Council, & Committees to create mechanisms and expedient

reporting for the direction of funds from the sale of/future sale of any properties and buildings since January 1, 2018 such that:

- **In consultation with appropriate local indigenous leadership including matriarchs, 5% of funds be returned to the Indigenous Nations, Metis, Inuit and communities who are the ancestral caretakers of that land for use as they see fit. AND**
- **2.5% of funds are set aside to fund and endow indigenous justice, reconciliation, and indigenous-led ministries in our diocese, AND**
- **2.5% of funds are forwarded to the Anglican Church of Canada Indigenous Ministries to provide tangible financial support for the self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church within the Anglican Church of Canada.**

Now for those of you who have never attended a Synod, once a motion has been seconded, delegates are free to state their opinion.

Using the microphones around the room, people stood to share their views for or against the motion. The floor was electric with members of Synod voicing their hurt, their experience of injustice and their fears.

At one point there was a motion to change the date, so that the most recent Diocesan property sales of 2018 would be excluded.

As delegates to Synod deliberated further over an amended motion.

Soon we realized that Christ was in our midst, asking us this same question:

“Do you want to be healed?”

We weren't sure – What is this position of power doing for us?

- Its keeping us ahead
- Its giving us Financial security
- And A sense of control

But what is it doing to us?

- Maintaining unfair privilege and preventing mutuality
- It's a denial of inequality and historic trauma
- Perpetuating fear

And what is it doing to others?

- Creating systems of inequality
- Continued Victimization and helplessness
- Re- traumatization

The motion was passed.

And we all, settler, immigrant and indigenous person alike, stood up, took up our mats and walked.

Some for the first time.

APPENDIX:

“A Covenant

We, representatives of the Indigenous people of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting in Winnipeg from the 23 to 26 of April, 1994, pledge ourselves to this covenant for the sake of our people and in trust of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:

Under the guidance of God’s spirit we agree to do all we can to call our people into unity in a new, self-determining community within The Anglican Church of Canada.

To this end, we extend the hand of partnership to all those who will help us build a truly Anglican Indigenous Church in Canada.

May God bless this new vision and give us grace to accomplish it. Amen.”

References, Primate Archbishop Michael Peers (1993)

My Brothers and Sisters:

Together here with you I have listened as you have told your stories of the residential schools.

I have heard the voices that have spoken of pain and hurt experienced in the schools, and of the scars which endure to this day.

I have felt shame and humiliation as I have heard of suffering inflicted by my people, and as I think of the part our church played in that suffering.

I am deeply conscious of the sacredness of the stories that you have told and I hold in the highest honour those who have told them.

I have heard with admiration the stories of people and communities who have worked at healing, and I am aware of how much healing is needed.

I also know that I am in need of healing, and my own people are in need of healing, and our church is in need of healing. Without that healing, we will continue the same attitudes that have done such damage in the past.

I also know that healing takes a long time, both for people and for communities.

I also know that it is God who heals, and that God can begin to heal when we open ourselves, our wounds, our failures and our shame to God. I want to take one step along that path here and now.

I accept and I confess before God and you, our failures in the residential schools. We failed you. We failed ourselves. We failed God.

I am sorry, more than I can say, that we were part of a system which took you and your children from home and family.

I am sorry, more than I can say, that we tried to remake you in our image, taking from you your language and the signs of your identity.

I am sorry, more than I can say, that in our schools so many were abused physically, sexually, culturally and emotionally.

On behalf of the Anglican Church of Canada, I present our apology.

I do this at the desire of those in the Church like the National Executive Council, who know some of your stories and have asked me to apologize.

I do this in the name of many who do not know these stories.

And I do this even though there are those in the church who cannot accept the fact that these things were done in our name.

As soon as I am home, I shall tell all the bishops what I have said, and ask them to co-operate with me and with the National Executive Council in helping this healing at the local level. Some bishops have already begun this work.

I know how often you have heard words which have been empty because they have not been accompanied by actions. I pledge to you my best efforts, and the efforts of our church at the national level, to walk with you along the path of God's healing.

The work of the Residential Schools Working Group, the video, the commitment and the effort of the Special

Assistants to the Primate for this work, the grants available for healing conferences, are some signs of that pledge, and we shall work for others.

This is Friday, the day of Jesus' suffering and death. It is the anniversary of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima, one of the most terrible injuries ever inflicted by one people on another.

But even atomic bombs and Good Friday are not the last word. God raised Jesus from the dead as a sign that life and wholeness are the everlasting and unquenchable purpose of God.

Thank you for listening to me.

+ Michael
Archbishop and Primate