

In preparation for Canada Day 2022

After his last meal with those who are closest to him, Jesus prepares his followers for his sudden and violent death. In prayer, Jesus speaks with Creator who brought the universe into being and who also brought Jesus himself into the world to be born with Mary as his mother. Jesus knows that Creator continues to act in time and space to create opportunities for new life to come into being and to bring new life into being. Jesus asks for protection for all who live by his teachings and work to bring healing into the world. Jesus prays, "I am not asking for you to take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the Evil One." John 17: 15.

Read John 17:20-26. What catches my attention?

In this gospel reading, Jesus asks Creator and Great Spirit to connect with those who have opened their ears to hear his teachings...who have opened their eyes to see the healing which he is doing... who have opened their minds to think with curiosity and creativity about how the world works...and who have opened their hearts to feel the same emotions which he feels towards every aspect of creation, including other Human Beings. Over three years, Jesus built relationships with these individuals and helped each of them to heal and grow. Jesus acknowledges that Creator and Great Spirit brought this gathering of individuals to him. Jesus wants those closest to him to survive the violence which will bring his own journey in space and time to an abrupt end but also to survive their feelings of profound loss and abandonment afterwards.

Jesus also asks Creator and Great Spirit to protect future generations of his followers. "I ask not only on behalf of these (who are gathered with me now) but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word!" John 17:20. What specifically is Jesus asking to happen? What do his followers need? It isn't land. It isn't wealth. It isn't political power. It isn't good looks. It isn't social popularity. It isn't fine clothing and jewelry. It isn't an abundance of food and drink. Jesus wants his followers to have the same simple and yet complicated relationship as he has with Creator and Great Spirit. Jesus prays, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17:21. Jesus wants his followers to be filled to overflowing with the generosity and love which he experiences each and every day. Jesus also wants those who join this first generation of followers to share in the same generosity and lovingkindness which Creator and Great Spirit abundantly has shown him. Jesus wants each successive generation who open their ears to listen to his teachings...who open their eyes to the healing which brings new life into being...who open their minds to know how to connect with the creative energy still at work in the universe...and who open their hearts to receive and give affirmation as Creator, the Eternal Word, and the Holy Spirit gives to you and I.

Reread John 17:20-26. What is God saying in this passage?

On May 23, 2021, news was shared that ground-penetrating radar identified the remains of 215 children and youth in unmarked graves in an apple orchard at Kamloops Indian Residential School. For many non-Indigenous Canadians, this news became the sudden "discovery" about a terrible part of the history of Canada. Indigenous Peoples had heard residential school survivors say that many children and youth did not return from residential schools to their homes, families, and communities. In 2015, the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was published. Over the course of six years, thousands of residential school survivors were interviewed from coast to coast to coast, sharing what happened to them and speaking about the ongoing impact of their residential school experiences on their lives. A section of the Truth and Reconciliation Report explored the deaths of children and youth at residential schools from coast to coast to coast, estimating the number to be about 4,100. Kamloops Indian Residential School was operated by the Roman Catholic Church from 1890 until 1969 and then as a day school by the federal government until 1978.

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In an interview with a journalist, the Chief of the Upper Nicola Indian Band in central British Columbia Harvey McLeod reported that he started having nightmares in May 2021 following the identification of those unmarked graves. Chief McLeod attended that residential school for only two years yet for months, he was tormented by nightmares. Like many residential school survivors, he was retraumatized. In these nightmares, a young girl clung to his leg or walked hand in hand with him. During the final nightmare, the young girl stepped forward towards a door, waved at him, and then left. Chief McLeod believed that this young girl attended Kamloops Indian Residential School and needed his care. Chief McLeod concluded that this young girl communicated to him that she was OK now and was going home. After this dream, Chief McLeod felt OK too. Chief McLeod pointed out that will take some time to make changes in addressing what happened in the past.

In the same newspaper article, another residential school survivor Percy Casper (73) who attended Kamloops Indian Residential School for ten years reported that when he heard the news in May 2021, he found himself feeling distraught and angry. He described himself as being wound tight like a rubber band about to break apart. Percy Casper is from Bonaparte Indian Band from Cache Creek A return to his ceremonial practices and cultural heritage kept him grounded. Attendance at an Indigenous Day celebration in June 2021 at a healing centre near his home helped him to focus and restored him to health and peace. During a closing healing ceremony, a mother grizzly bear and her cubs watched as participants set out salmon, venison, and berries at this sacred site. As the grizzly bear and her family walked out of the forest to eat this sacred meal, Mr. Casper understood that he was to seek strength by revisiting his spiritual practices in order to help himself, his children, and his grandchildren. Mr. Casper is a veteran with the US Marines and survived military service in Vietnam as a young adult.

Immediately following the announcement of the news about the identification of children and youth in these unmarked graves, an Indigenous and environmental law professor at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops Nicole Schabus started receiving calls from residential school survivors who returned to being small, vulnerable children re-experiencing their own trauma and the pain associated with their experiences of intergenerational traumas. Dr. Schabus was the life partner with the Grand Chief of the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council Arthur Manuel before his death in 2017.

Another residential school survivor from Adams Lake Indian Band Mike Arnouse (79) was interviewed for this newspaper article. Over the year since May 2021, Mr. Arnouse devoted time and energy to reconnecting to the land through his spiritual practices and day-to-day activities. Mr. Arnouse observed that in the cycle of life, the birds and the four-legged animals and the fish in the waters all know what to do but Human Beings do not seem to know what to do. In commenting on his eleven years in attendance at Kamloops Indian Residential School, Mr. Arnouse joked, "I was the smartest one in Grade 2 for eight years." In getting out on the land, Mr. Arnouse protested the efforts of residential schools to remove children from not only their families and communities but also from the land and waters which Creator had given his People as gifts of Mother Earth to tend for thousands of years.

Another residential school survivor from Tk'emlups te Secwepemc and poet Garry Godfriedson (69) noted that his People struggled to mourn their losses in private and continued to experience episodes of anxiety particularly with respect to what the next steps will be in dealing with the remains in each of the unmarked graves.

At ceremonies on the first anniversary of the news announcement of the identification of unmarked graves of children and youth, the Chief of the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Nation Rosanne Casimir spoke clearly, "non-Indigenous are now wanting to know about the real hidden history of this country. That we know is a good thing. Those conversations, as hard as they are, are going to lead to steps that we need to make towards our collective history."

At these same ceremonies, the Governor General Mary Simon stated in her role as the Crown, "It's unimaginable that a place of learning was so cruel. It's inexplicable that people committed these

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atrocities or that people could stand silent as they were committed. We mourn with you. We stand with you. We believe you.” The Governor General noted that time was needed for grieving to take place.

Over the year, a number of other Indigenous Peoples have identified unmarked graves of children and youth from coast to coast to coast. The most recent identifications happened at Blue Quills Indian Residential School on the traditional territories of Saddle Creek Cree Nation northeast of Edmonton in Alberta.

Reread John 17:20-26. What is God calling us to be and do?

While waiting outside a fabric store in Wiarton on May 24, 2022, a man walked past and I commented that I admired his Orange Shirt with the message, EVERY CHILD MATTERS. In conversation, he pointed out that last year Canada Day was experienced in a very different way following the announcement of the identification of 215 unmarked graves of children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School. This stranger pointed out that some in Wiarton wore Orange Shirts and walked down to Colpoy’s Bay as an act of solidarity. I pointed out that my wife and I passed a number of people wearing Orange Shirts walking from Hepworth to Sauble Beach on the side of the road. I wondered what was going to happen for Canada Day this year and this stranger shrugged his shoulders. I pointed out that many in Indigenous communities were still mourning.

As worshipping communities, what will we do to demonstrate the generosity and lovingkindness of Creator, Jesus the Eternal Word, and the Holy Spirit? How will we communicate to Indigenous Peoples our solidarity with them and our intention to be in right relationship with them? How do we find out what is good news for the members of those Indigenous Peoples closest to where we worship?