

Sermon for 19th Sunday after Pentecost/Orange Shirt Sunday – September 29, 2024

Some of you may be wondering who I am and why I was asked to come preach this Sunday, so I want to start by telling you all a bit about myself. First, an introduction in Michif, the language of my people, the Métis.

Taanishi kiiyawow. Boston Laferté dishinikaashon. Aen Michif niiya. Treaty 8 dooschiin, maaka ni wiikin daan territwayr kayaash ooschi li Lekwungen pi WSANEC li moond itagawiikichik. Mii nom di famii nimaama tehkee si Johnson pi Campbell. Mii nom di famii nipaapa tehkee si Laferté, Brazeau, Morriseau, pi Poitras.

What I said was “Hello everyone. My name is Boston Laferté. I am a Métis person. I am from Treaty 8, but now I live on the traditional lands of the Lekwungen and WSANEC people. My family names on my mom’s side are Johnson and Campbell. My family names on my dad’s side are Laferté, Brazeau, Morriseau, and Poitras.

I am a current student in the Indigenous law program at the University of Victoria, and a Master of Divinity student at Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon. I also want to share a bit about the Métis with you all. I find a lot of people hear about the Métis, but might not know anything beyond the name.

The Métis people first showed up on the prairies in the early 1600s when European fur traders were coming over here in large number. These fur traders would marry Indigenous women to secure relationships and trade partnerships with their nations. They called them marriages a la façon du pays or ‘country marriages’. This essentially meant that they

would “marry” these women without seeing it as legitimate, because there wasn’t any priest or religious figure to make it official.

The children of these marriages started to notice something ... They would be considered too Indigenous for their white fathers (it was often the case that when colonization started to expand, these traders would simply kick their Indigenous wives and children out in favour of a white woman), but they would also retain a lot of their fathers’ culture that their mothers and mothers’ family simply did not have. This included religion, as many kept Catholic practices and Indigenous spiritual practices. Often observing both without any notion of them being different, or one being more legitimate than the other.

These children started to gather together and share these intertwined aspects of culture and religion, eventually creating entirely new ones that were apart from both their fathers and their mothers. At first, they called themselves Bois-Brûlés, but eventually came to call themselves Métis. From that point on, the Métis went through many significant events and had many significant leaders, so many that we would be here all day if I tried to recount them. They hunted the buffalo in huge brigades made up of many families, worked as voyageurs for the Hudson’s Bay and Northwest Companies, were interpreters, translators, border patrol, and solo traders, just to name a few. Something important to understand about Métis people is that after the Northwest Resistance of 1885, our nation spread out all over Canada which is why there are Métis governments in every province. We became the ‘Road Allowance’ people for a time, struggling with extreme poverty which many Métis families have never quite recovered from.

It is important to talk a bit about that history, because it all ends up at the reason we're here today. Métis people, like all Indigenous peoples, went through the residential and day school systems. If you don't know about day schools, they were essentially schools where much of the same abuse was going on, but children would return home regularly. Another way that Métis children were ripped from their homes was through the "Adopt Indian Métis" or AIM Project. They would put First Nations and Métis children in the newspaper like some sort of classified ad, and encourage white families to take them.

In the reading from Esther for today, one small line really stood out to me: "from mourning into a holiday". Because that's what's happened with tomorrow a bit, right? Orange Shirt Day originates from six-year-old Phyllis Webstad going to a residential school in her brand-new orange shirt that her grandmother bought. When she got there, she was stripped of all her belongings, including that orange shirt, and forced into a system of abuse, forced assimilation, and isolation from family and community. One experience of many that warrants extreme mourning. And now it's a holiday!

I know there are still many events that take place commemorating the atrocities of residential schools, but I also know that for many people tomorrow is now just a bonus day off. I'm not trying to say there is anything wrong with taking a bit of time. We live in a very busy world, and I think most of us can always use extra days off. However, if that is all Orange Shirt Day or National Day of Truth and Reconciliation comes to mean, then we have a serious problem. It is our responsibility as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada to ensure that these days of mourning keep their meaning. It would be a great dishonour to the children who suffered if we allow them to slide into performance, as we sometimes see with practices like land acknowledgements ...

In the Gospel reading today, we hear a bit more about our responsibilities. Jesus does not mince words. He tells the disciples “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell.” He also tells them “If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched.” If we read it literally, it’s a very intense demand. But we can read it in another way.

We all know that there are sinful problems within the church. Racism, white supremacy, colonialism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, sexism, and other forms of systemic violence and oppression are all still present in the church, the body of Christ. We know these are still present, because we have had the taskforces actively working on addressing them since 2019.

So, what if we think about Jesus’ command with these in mind? As it stands these are all, unfortunately, part of the body of Christ. They are a part of all our institutions, just as a hand is part of a body. Jesus tells us that we are to cut these out, as it is better to be missing them than the alternative. It’s not comfortable to get rid of these parts. Our systems groan and despair when we try. However, it is necessary ...

We can feel this on an individual level as well. We are all raised up to normalize one or more of these things in our lives. They become part of us, just as our hands are part of our bodies. We can feel immense discomfort when it comes to getting rid of them. But Jesus

tells us it is better to be missing them than the alternative. That doesn't make it any easier, does it?

This act of cutting out can feel really impossible sometimes. So much so, that some of us may simply give up. But I want to remind us all, myself included, that it is okay to make mistakes, and it is okay to take rest. I think that activism fatigue is a real thing ... I have often felt it myself. The Third Commandment says, "You are to keep holy the day of rest." In Luther's *Large Catechism* he says, "They were to refrain from hard work and to rest, so that both human beings and animals might be refreshed and not be exhausted by constant labour." In the case of the *Large Catechism*, the "they" Luther is referring to is the Israelites, but I think that same sentiment can still apply. We need the rest, because the labour is important work, but it ceases being done when we burn ourselves out.

We need to know that, while the labour is important work, we will *not* do it perfectly. We will hit stumbling blocks on the way, and we may even hurt people more when all we are trying to do is good. But we know that we are recipients of God's grace through the Holy Spirit. We try our best not to sin and to do what God commands of us, like getting rid of these parts of ourselves, but we know that in some way we are going to fail. And we receive grace anyways ...

Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE for SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 29, 2024

Holy God, God of love,

You are the Creator of this land and all good things. We acknowledge the pain and shame of our colonial history in settling on Turtle Island, now known as Canada, and confess that we have been complicit and contributed to the longstanding harm and suffering of Indigenous peoples, especially children.

Holy God, God of love,

We thank you for the resilience of Indigenous peoples who have persevered and passed on the wisdom of their teachings to their families and communities, and have upheld the value of preserving their ways of being, including their languages, laws, and cultural practices. Help us as settlers to be open to learning from our Indigenous neighbours and to sincerely work towards truth telling, healing and reconciliation. Our hope is in you because your son Jesus Christ came to reconcile the world to you.

Holy God, God of love,

Open up our hearts so that we may hear the message you teach of a world in which the wrongs of the past are recognised, apologies offered, forgiveness received, and restitution of Indigenous rights are entrenched in our laws and relationships with one another.

Holy God, God of love,

Help us to reach out to a world in which a reconciled people walk and talk together sharing stories. Help us to reach out to a world in which all burn with the desire to have your peace and justice reign.

Holy God, God of love,

We pray for the world around us, for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help: for those without enough to eat; for those caught up in violence and political uprisings; for those picking up the pieces after natural disasters, especially those impacted by flooding and destruction caused by Hurricane Helene.

Holy God, God of love,

We pray for those who find themselves in bondage: those forced into slavery and human trafficking, those oppressed by governments or economic systems; those facing wars and conflicts, especially the people of Ukraine, Gaza, Israel, Lebanon, Sudan, Haiti, and all places where people are in danger and have had to leave their ravaged homes.

Holy God, God of love,

Renew your creation where it has been shaken by disaster and climate change. Encourage animals and people who rebuild; bring plants again to blossom. Restore calm in the midst of chaos. Support the work of people who blaze paths of diplomacy and peace among the nations. Strengthen them when they feel discouraged or weary, that they may fulfill the calling you have given them.

Holy God, God of love,

Create opportunities for healing conversation and comforting hospitality in long term facilities, hospitals, and homes. Bring hope and peace to those burdened by illness. Pour out your abundant grace on all who call upon your name, especially Bishop Kathy and Kristin Steele

Holy God, God of love,

We pray for family and friends who are suffering: those struggling physically or emotionally, those working to overcome mental illness; those facing challenges at home or at work; those who are housebound and isolated; those grieving the death of a loved one. Comfort them in sorrow; support them in grief.

Holy God, God of love,

We pray for Spirit of Life Lutheran in Vancouver - Rev. Aneeta Saroop, North Thompson Ecumenical Shared Ministry in Barriere and Clearwater, our sister congregation in Peru, San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land; for our Bishops Susan and Kathy, Bishop Anna, acting Primate Archbishop Anne Germond of the Anglican church in Canada; all pastors, priests, deacons, lay leaders, musicians, and volunteers as they lead their congregations in these challenging times of climate change and natural disasters around the world.

Holy God, God of love,

We pray for your church around the world, that it would be a living demonstration of your coming kingdom: offering hospitality to all, ready to help in times of need, showing love to friends and enemies alike, seeking to live in peace with all.

Holy God, God of love,

By the power of your Holy Spirit, let our hearts fill with love and acceptance in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, our rock, creating, redeeming and sanctifying. We praise you for your faithful love, and for the mercy you have shown toward us. Open our eyes to recognize your presence in our lives and throughout all Creation. Open our ears to hear your call. Give us faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

Our Father ...