

## **Reflection for Orange Shirt Sunday-Creation 4-September 28, 2025**

### **by Jennifer Irving**

On Monday this week, I started receiving daily emails from The Prayer Bench as part of their autumn instalment of Stroll for your Soul (a Spiritual practice that our adult study group here at Centennial has participated for many years). This year, the focus of the Stroll is “Shelter” and on that first day Janice wrote to participants: Whether permanent, semi-permanent or temporary, a shelter provides us a place to pause and rest for a while. A shelter offers protection. It’s a refuge, a safe place, a haven. A shelter allows us to go somewhere to retreat. Our hope for this Stroll is that for a time you will find shelter here. We invite you to see this experience as a safe place to explore and rest. Shortly after receiving this email, I took a sneak peek at the lectionary readings for this Sunday—Orange Shirt Sunday—and saw Psalm 91 was the Psalm for today (that we just sang together responsively) and immediately could hear the words of that first verse in my head:

You who dwell in the shelter of our God,  
who abide in this shadow for life:  
say to the Lord, “My refuge, my rock in whom I trust.”

And I knew that image of shelter was what I wanted to reflect upon today.

I initially thought that I would focus solely on the Psalm—I included the other two readings for this Sunday in the service but they wouldn’t have anything to do with this part of the service—I even told my lectionary bible study group as much when we met on Wednesday afternoon—we’re going to talk about the gospel reading from Luke but don’t worry—it’s not making it into my reflection for Sunday—you don’t have to worry one bit. I even admitted that the past two times this reading has come around in the lectionary since I moved here—in 2022 and 2019—I didn’t even include it!

But, when I sat down to actually write my sermon for today, surrounded by the beauty of creation sitting on the deck of our family cottage up in Muskoka, sheltered by a wonderful new gazebo we installed a few years ago, it seemed to me that all of our readings today have something to say about what it means to be sheltered—to feel protected—to have a place to rest—and something to say that might be relevant on this Sunday in particular as we think about the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

The truth is, I often want to get straight to the “Good News” and if I had my way, I’d ignore the bad news—whether it is the parts of the bible that I don’t like or find easy or in relationships or in looking at the truth part of the indigenous experience here since the arrival of colonial settlers.

And when I think about the gospel reading for this week—about the experience of Lazarus, and the lack of shelter, protection, respite from the elements, love and care he received from the rich man—I can’t help but draw parallel to the way that children dumped off at Residential schools were treated. The shelter of family and tradition ripped away leaving them completely vulnerable to the elements that destroyed both their bodies and their souls. Is it some small comfort to picture those little ones held on the lap of their ancestors—sheltered for all eternity? Maybe, but that’s not the real comfort the first listeners would have received listening to this Parable. And it is a parable.

A parable that is told by Jesus not to comfort those who are suffering and treated unjustly with the hope in an afterlife—no—this isn't to be read as literally what happens when we die—at least I don't believe this is meant to tell us literally about heaven and hell—as a parable it is meant to be heard by those surrounding Jesus as a lesson and a warning. As a “story” that impacts how they are living now.

Those who are living in poverty, without protection or refuge are being told without a shadow of a doubt, that this is not a sign that their God has turned away from them—this is not a punishment for sin. In fact, their God is suffering alongside them and their God is the God of Abraham who longs to cradle them on his lap and hold them in the palm of his hand. And it is telling those who are sheltered and safe that their God expects them to love one another, protect one another, follow the example of Moses and the prophets.

It does not let us off the hook of reconciliation in this lifetime. There is a lot of judgement in this passage that we shouldn't ignore or shy away from. In order for true reconciliation to occur, we have to be willing to listen to Moses and the Prophets along with the one who rose from the dead and love one another.

We must be able to bear the responsibility and be willing to make reparations. Then, and only then, there might be a chance that others will know we are Christians by our love. Our love is the ultimate shelter. Apparently, there is an Irish proverb that translates, *“In the shelter of each other the people live.”* Isn't that beautiful? If we're loving one another as God loves us, what an amazing and beautiful shelter we provide for one another.

I wonder if Jeremiah had a sense of the truth of that proverb when he bought that piece of property even when they were a long, long way away from ever being able to build an actual shelter on it. The hope that transaction gave the people—that was the shelter.

I would argue that “shelter” is one of the most amazing things our faith provides to us. Even while the storms of life are raging all around us—and by God do they rage—I've felt the words of Psalm 91 in my soul. How many of you here today have felt this too? That our faith in God's love, our hope in God's unending grace, our sense of the Holy all around us—that we often sense through one another (we being the only hands Christ has now after all)—that offers us a refuge, a place to rest, protection and care. I know I am not the only one who has heard someone say—or said it themselves—that they don't know if they could have gotten through something or other if it hadn't been for their faith—being able to turn to God and feel held in the palm of God's hand as they cried their tears and shared their pain. It is not nothing. This shelter our faith provides.

A faith that is manifest in this church community—whether it shown in a warm meal, a warm hug, a heartfelt prayer or a listening ear. These too are a refuge, a safe haven, a shelter in the storm. *“In the shelter of each other the people live.”*

On this Orange Shirt Sunday, let us not underestimate how our actions, however small, towards truth and reconciliation—towards living into right relations—can cover us all—offering shelter and protection, refuge and rest. We have a firm foundation upon which to lean and eagle's wings to raise us up! Thanks be to God.