

“Reconciliation and Atonement.”

I empathize with our rich man today. He just wants some comfort in his sin; and he doesn't want to change; and he wants his brothers to have the tools to not suffer in sin. He wants the afterlife to be as easy as life was. Who doesn't want things to be easy?

He knows Lazarus by name. So, he's seen him at the end of his driveway begging for food many times. He knows Lazarus' needs, but he accepts Lazarus needs as just the way things are. No need to rock the boat. Lazarus is a servant. The rich man is served. He is entitled. But he doesn't seem self-aware to this. I have spots I'm not aware of, too. Consciously or not, I have accepted some people just have easier lives than others, too.

The rich man asks Abraham to order Lazarus about in the afterlife to serve the rich man. Make Lazarus bring me water. Make Lazarus go warn my brothers.

Abraham refuses. And says even if Lazarus wanted to do this for you, he cannot.

"But how will my brothers know to change their ways! Someone must warn them that sins have costs."

Abraham points out the brothers have all the prophets and Moses, all of scripture, and teachers, to warn them from sin and selfishness. They have a road map already to avoid suffering.

The subtext is to us. Abraham is pointing out you and I have all of the teachings and Moses, the prophets and scripture. We have a road map to avoid sin and selfishness.

The rich man says, "But they'll listen if someone returns from the dead to say this!"

Abraham says, "I doubt it."

And we are left with the question... will we listen? Jesus returned from the dead. Will we notice?

I empathize with the rich man because he wants an easy way to make all things right AND continue his comfortable life. Who doesn't want to have their cake and eat it too? Who doesn't want to wear orange today and consider reconciliation done?

I relate to him. And I also know I don't want to be him.

Consider:

It's been 10 years.

10 years since the Truth and Reconciliation Report was released.

10 years since 94 concrete, specific, calls to action were issued.

10 years since the government vowed to fulfill every single call.

15 calls have been fulfilled. 33 began. 29 are planned. 17 are not touched.

The work has barely begun. Only in 2021 did a bill to establish Sept. 30 as a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation statutory holiday receive royal assent. Federally recognized... but it isn't recognized here in Ontario.

39 years since the United Church of Canada held General Council in Sudbury. Our moderator The Right Rev. Bob Smith stood by a sacred fire with the All Native Circle Conference and publicly apologized:

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your Elders an understanding of creation and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich, and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision. In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the gospel. We tried to make you be like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were. As a result, you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred, and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and to walk together with us in the Spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God's creation healed.

At this general council, people had brought stones from all across Canada. Elder Art Solomon and Rev. Maxine McVey looked at all these stones after the apology and said this place needed marked.

M'Chigeeng First Nation and Whitefish River First Nation donated the 2500 million year old red quartzite stone making the core - the land which supports all life.

It is an Apology Cairn. And an incomplete one because the process of reconciliation is not complete.

The All Native Circle, which has evolved into the National Indigenous Church, received the apology but didn't accept it.

Because the work isn't done.

We are not reconciled.

There is still atonement to be done.

Repentance to be manifested.

Racism to rout out.

This very General Council this summer I heard people say, "I'm so sick of apologizing. How long do we have to do this?" "Making white people the bad guys in every story is becoming trying." "But what more can we do?" "It's only about and always about money - they always want more money."

Again: we are not reconciled.

There is still atonement to be done.

Repentance to be manifested.

Racism to rout out.

Elders and knowledge keepers; oral stories and written records; studies and councils have told us ways forward. We have the skills and the knowledge. We have the warnings and the guides. We have 94 solid steps for one issue - the residential schools - alone. The 94 Calls don't touch all the other issues like treaties and land use, systemic injustice and politicians continuing to undermine indigenous rights and ways of self-governance. Just on schools we have 94 calls to action - and we have not taken them.

Because it's difficult. Who wants to give that Lazarus a place in their house? Who will participate in the Land Back movement? Who wants to give up privilege? Are we willing to admit how little we know and how much we have to learn? Who wants to give up control and power? To treat First Nations as actual sovereign nations- like India or China, England or the USA – with respect, negotiation of relationships, equality, and appreciation for different ways of doing things, different cultures, different laws, different language.

Very few.

Kicking the can down the road to another generation sounds easier. Another decade. Another half century. Another hundred years - they can deal with this. Today I am comfortable.

Our scripture warns us that today's comfort rests on the misery of others. Today's comfort leads to tomorrow's torment. We must change. We cannot wait. The dead have already spoken - from discovered graves; and from old photographs - from records unsealed and from painful family stories shared - the dead have returned and warned us.

Will we listen?

God sets the choice before us.

What will you choose?

Amen.



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