

Sermon
National Indigenous Day of Prayer
Sunday, June 25th, 2023
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: [Isaiah 40:25-31](#); [Psalm 19](#); [Philippians 4:4-9](#); [John 1:1-18](#)

“Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such.” Everyone is you, living a different life...

This is one way of expressing the “platinum rule”. I think we’re probably all familiar with the golden rule, often expressed as: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The golden rule takes a sympathetic stance. It can be well meaning, but it makes some dangerous assumptions: that what is good for us is good for others. It also assumes superior knowledge of what is good or harmful for others. The platinum rule turns our stance from sympathy to empathy. It can be expressed as:

“Do unto others as *they* would have you do unto them.” Another way of saying this is: “Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such.”

This highlights mutual respect. This mutual respect requires knowing ourselves and what shapes and colours our perspective, and to getting to know others in a genuine, heart-to-heart way. This is asking “How are you?” or “What can I do to help?” and then listening and responding without judgement, without criticism. This takes time, and patience, but empathy – doing unto others as they would have us do unto them – connects hearts, and it is what our world needs...

Heart connections – looking at the whole of our world through a lens of “Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such.” – is what our world needs as we dismantle systemic racism, as we free the oppressed, as we right the injustices that are all around. This is our call, our vocation, as Christian disciples.

June 21st. National Indigenous Day of Prayer, which we acknowledge and honour in our service this morning.

Residential Schools. The 60s Scoop. There isn’t even a whisper of “Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such” in this history.

There are epidemic rates of suicide, diabetes, addiction, violence and incarceration among Indigenous peoples. There are many Indigenous communities without access to clean water. It is four years since the Final Report on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls revealed that persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. Present brokenness in Indigenous communities, harms to Indigenous people, tells us that we are not living from a place of heart connection where our thoughts and actions acknowledge that "Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such."

In an interview in 2021, Chief Cadmuss Delorme, of the Cowassess First Nation called for a mental "reset" on the path to reconciliation in this country.

Part of this "reset" is in fact a reset of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus came proclaiming a message of radical love and acceptance, but this is not always what we live out as Christians. It is certainly not what was lived out in Indian Residential Schools. It is not lived out when we question the truths that Residential School survivors tell, or when we try to relegate the trauma and suffering of survivors to a dark chapter in the past. Jesus came proclaiming a message of solidarity, particularly with those who are vulnerable and marginalized. Pride Month draws to a close this week. Jesus's message of radical love, acceptance and solidarity is not lived out when we condemn identities and relationships that might look different from our own.

The Gospel passage appointed for National Indigenous Day of Prayer is the Prologue of John's Gospel. We've just heard an Indigenous translation of this passage. In it, we hear about the light the darkness cannot overcome, cannot put out. When we lean into and live out "Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such" we are acknowledging that light, and we are kindling it so that it shines brighter in the world. When we do unto others as they would have us do unto them, we acknowledge that the divine light is in all of us, in all things. We respect that light in each other and in all of creation. Letting our own light shine – especially into the dark places in our world – and looking for the light in others is relating heart to heart, and this is what will bring the change our world needs so desperately...

Indigenous culture and spirituality has much to offer us. It is rooted in creation, making connections everywhere. It is steeped in empathy. It resonates with the seven sacred teachings: Love. Respect. Courage. Honesty. Wisdom. Humility. Truth.

These first verses of John's Gospel are infused with mystery and "more"; it's one of my favourite passages of scripture because of that mystery - the poetry of these verses stretches me out of time and tangibility. This mystery and "more" touches something deep in our humanity: a whisper, a longing, a searching.

Yet then we have verse 14: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us", and in the First Nations version that we heard this morning an even more vivid assertion: Creator's Word became a flesh-and-blood human being and pitched his sacred tent among us, living as one of us.

The Word – the Christ, having always been and always being – pitches his sacred tent among us. Jesus pitched his in first century Palestine, and began a radical relating, heart-to-heart.

We heard this, this morning:

"Creator's Word became a flesh-and-blood human being and pitched his sacred tent among us, living as one of us. We looked upon his great beauty and saw how honorable he was, the kind of honor held only by this one Son who fully represents his Father—full of his great kindness and truth."
And:

"No one has ever seen the Great Spirit, but the one Son, who is himself the Great Spirit and closest to the Father's heart, has shown us what he is like."

Jesus has shown us what God is like. God is not angry and distant. Not cruel and judgemental. God is full of great kindness and truth.

We need the mystery and "more" that John's Gospel offers us; we need to tend to that whisper, longing or searching in ourselves. We need to tend to the light in ourselves – to know ourselves as beloved – so that we can acknowledge that light anywhere and everywhere, starting right where we are – so that we can pitch our tents and relate heart-to-heart as Jesus did.

We do that tending, that kindling of the light with what Jesus showed us about God: we do it with kindness. With compassion – for ourselves, and for others, and for our world.

We do this as individuals, and we do it as a collective, as a community – this is what church is! The invitation to tend that light, the invitation into kindness and compassion is open to anyone and everyone. We can – we must, as disciples of Jesus – acknowledge “Everyone is you, living a different life. Treat them as such.” We must stand up to and speak up to dismantle the discrimination, injustice and oppression that dim the light of God’s love in ourselves and in others. This includes standing up for and speaking up for our black siblings, our 2SLGBTQQIA siblings, and our Indigenous siblings.

In a few minutes we’ll share in a ritual with our prayer net. You’re invited to tie a ribbon – in one of the four colours of the medicine wheel – on our prayer net. May this ritual make space for us to acknowledge the past and present brokenness in ourselves, in our country, and in our relationships, particularly with our Indigenous siblings. At the same time, may it be a reminder that heart-to-heart relating, that radical love and acceptance and solidarity is possible. May it be a reminder that there is a light that comes to all the peoples of the world and shines on everyone. A light that shines into the darkness, and that the darkness cannot overcome or put out. A light that is waiting to be kindled into a way of love and hope – of kindness, compassion and radical heart-to-heart relating – in our world. May we feel that light in us and around us this morning and may that spark in us fresh resolve to shine that light in the world. In Jesus name. Amen.