

***Loving God and Neighbour:
Living out the Lord's Prayer
Psalm 24
July 4, 2021***

Where did we go wrong? When we read our Psalm today, we realize afresh just how far short we have come in our relationship with God and our neighbour. We are asked the big question: **Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. (Slide 1)** Of course, I know, our sins are washed away through our faith in Jesus. But the step we took into this faith relationship is only the beginning of our journey with God. We also promised to live out the Lord's prayer: we pray this prayer each week: **forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us; and your kingdom come, on earth as in heaven.** And so, as Tom Wright reminded us, Christians are people who pray these prayers every day: **the kingdom prayer and the forgiveness prayer.** (God and the Pandemic, p.18) **(slide 2)**

In the case of the second of these prayers we certainly have to offer this prayer in response to our participation in the Residential Schools. The Presbyterian Church in Canada issued this statement of repentance and commitment to action: **aware of our own responsibility with regard to the sin of colonialism and our operation of residential schools, both of which we recognize today as instruments of a genocide against Indigenous people in what is today called Canada. (Slide 3 & 4 blank)**

As more and more graves are discovered on the grounds of former Residential Schools, which we and other denominations ran for most of a century, the need for confession and for justice becomes critical. The Presbyterian Church in Canada operated eleven schools for indigenous children, the first opening in the 1880's. These schools were in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1925 all but two of the schools that were still open were transferred to the United Church of Canada. Our two schools continued to operate until 1969 when the Government of Canada took them over, one in Ontario, the other in Manitoba.

In 1994 we made a formal apology and confession to the indigenous peoples for our role in running these schools. We said this: **We acknowledge that the stated policy of the Government of Canada was to assimilate Aboriginal peoples to the dominant culture, and that The Presbyterian Church in Canada co-operated in this policy. We acknowledge that the roots of the harm we have done are found in the attitudes and values of western European colonialism, ... As part of that policy we, with other churches, encouraged the government to ban some important spiritual practices through which Aboriginal peoples experienced the presence of the creator God. For the Church's complicity in this policy, we ask forgiveness. (Slides 5 & 6 & 7 blank)**

What I think it is important to realize is that our churches are part of a much longer history of colonial power. I found the article in the Saturday **Spectator** very helpful on this subject, "Where Christianity Went Wrong and How to Fix It". Victor Cyr asks us how such a horrendous crime could have been committed by the Christian churches? Did they not believe that we are to love God and neighbour? He reminds us that this colonial mindset started way back with Constantine in the fifth century. Once the empire was married to Christianity, the bishops gradually became the political power brokers throughout Europe. And throughout the next fifteen hundred years, the church and the political powers joined hands in the exercise of power. Examples of this marriage are legion, but a couple will suffice: the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition.

The residential schools are another recent example of this marriage of the political and religious powers. The churches teamed up with the provincial and federal governments to help "Christianize" the native peoples. This was our belief, sadly wrong of course, that we knew best what these native peoples needed in order to be like us. It was, no more or less, our cultural arrogance that shaped this policy and practice. At its heart, this practice stemmed from the dominant Christian culture's colonialism and systemic racism. For this undoubtedly, we ought to feel ashamed and saddened.

As a counter point to all this dark history, Cyr reminds us, there were and still are thousands of committed Christians around the world, and in Canada, who are living out the message of Christ with love and compassion toward all neighbours. Cyr ends his piece with a quote from a 60's songwriter: **when the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.** Amen to that! So, yes, we, along with our brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, offer lament, confession, and deep regret, for our participation in this tragic history. We want to be part of a justice movement that seeks to find ways to bring reconciliation and peace to all those who have been lost, for those who continue to struggle with this history and for those whose lives were deeply scarred by our sinful action. Lord, have mercy on us!

How do we move forward? How do we live out the prayer Jesus taught us? How can we live out our faith with honesty and integrity? I found Rachel Evans helpful on this question in her book, **Searching for Sunday. (Slide 8 & 9 blank)** She reminded me that our common responses to questions about our welfare, especially in church on Sunday, are to say, "I'm fine", "how are you?" Why is it, she asks, that in church we are often more like a country club than an AA meeting. This impulse, she claims, comes from a long, distinguished Christian tradition, which in Latin is called, ***totally faking it!***

It used to be that we were part of the dominant culture and we all had a similar face toward the world around us. We thought that everyone ought to think and be like us. We were a Christian country! This is what was at the heart of our sins toward native peoples. And so, we thought that perhaps church is for putting on our best performances. We still have the mistaken notion that church is for the healthy, even when Jesus was quite explicit that he came not for the well but the sick. Church is not for "good people" but for "resurrected people," as Rachel reminds us. So, we tend to fake it more often than we care to admit. What would church be like if we were a community open to being honest about our vulnerability and pain? Healing and wholeness could flow like refreshing streams in summer when communities open to God in forgiveness and love.

A hymn we sing: **Praise, my soul, the King of heaven; to his feet your tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore his praises sing. Alleluia, alleluia! (Slide 10)**

I hope this expresses how you feel this morning! It tells us that God in Christ has restored our spiritual centre, healed our sins, restored us into a right relationship, and through grace and forgiveness put our lives back on the right track.

The question our Psalm asked us at the beginning of this sermon was: **Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts...** The answer is fairly clear from Scripture. It is those who have been washed and cleansed through faith in Jesus. This moves us to praise, but more than that, it moves us to living out our forgiveness and healing toward our neighbour. Being a Christian really means no more or less living out our Lord's prayer. Certainly, we need healing, healing of that colonialism that plagued so much of our history. Healing from our systemic racism that has perverted the ways we treat native peoples and others who are not like us. Healing from our sins of oppression and arrogance. Lord, in your mercy, may we be changed in heart and attitude toward all our neighbours. Hear our prayer, Lord!

Amen