

Do Not Fear

June 21, 2020 Pentecost 3A

Indigenous People's Day

Matthew 10:24-39

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Before the Pandemic hit Canada, we were in the midst of an [extended protest](#) by the Wetsuwet'en nation, who had set up blockades at the site of the Coastal Gaslink pipeline development on their land. Their supporters had set up blockades across the country. The Government and company did not have the permission from the Hereditary Chiefs to develop the pipeline on their territory. There were requests, demands, and threats by the government and legal authorities to take down the barricades. At one point they were removed by force and violently but not long afterward they went back up. The Indigenous people and their supporters may have had fear, but they did not let that stop them in their quest for justice and standing up for their territory. They had a mission they were committed to and were not going to be deterred from it.

In our passage today, Jesus is instructing the disciples to prepare them to go out into the communities. He knows it will not be easy for them and is telling them so. The religious authorities have criticized and ridiculed him and would do the same or worse to his followers, as he says: *If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!* He said earlier in the passage, as we read last week, *I am sending you out as sheep among wolves.* So Jesus also tells them, do not fear those who will insult, try to hurt, or may even try to kill them because God is with them, knows them, and sees them as valuable. They had a mission they were to be committed to and were not to let fear deter them from it. So, the message for us as well is do not fear the challenges that are before us. It can be intimidating to wonder how we can address racism. To understand how white supremacy works in our system. What it means to understand and give up our white privilege. To look toward dismantling colonialism. These are daunting and challenging tasks. Yet as people of faith, we are called to work toward a kingdom where all can live with dignity of enjoying full rights and privileges. On this Indigenous People's Day, it is important to explore what this means for us, so we can begin the hard work of addressing racism, colonialism and white supremacy. It will not be without challenge as there will be resistance as we do this work. In spite of that, Jesus tells us do not fear.

I wish to draw from a sermon provided for this day, written by Hoeun Lee, United Church minister in Saskatchewan who is originally from South Korea. He writes:

Sometimes a comparison is made to say that, unlike the United States, where terrible genocides happened, White settlers in Canada made treaties with Indigenous peoples. I have met some Canadians who believe that the good Canadians did not commit such awful crimes as the Americans did—except for the residential schools. Yet let me ask you one thing about the treaties. Did *Treaty No. 6 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Plain and Wood Cree Indians and other Tribes of Indians* mutually benefit both sides? Hold on a second, wasn't this "unequal" treaty the solid foundation of the legitimate colonization of Indigenous people in Canada? When justice-minded, non-Indigenous people in Canada say, "We are treaty people," perhaps this action for justice, made with good intentions, produces an unexpected side effect? In other words, totally unintentionally, this might imply that we participate in justifying and perpetuating the colonizing history, in a sense.

Hoeun, makes a good point. When we say We are all Treaty people, it only has meaning if we know what the treaties say, and are working to uphold our commitments to the treaty. For us now, I think this means to make reparation and work towards reconciliation. It means to work to undo and change colonialism and the white supremacy imbedded in it.

We have seen numerous examples of this colonial history lived out in recent weeks. Videos of horrendous violence against indigenous people being arrested. Indigenous people under distress, being killed by RCMP sent to help. Jagmeet Singh was ejected from the House of Parliament for calling another MP racist, when over the years, since 1974 at least 7 white MP's have called other MP's racist but there was no expulsion for any of them.

Can we embrace and support the Idle No More movement and say Indigenous Lives Matter as readily as many here have embraced Black Lives Matter? It is closer to home and therefore more important that we do. Hoeun Lee shares a story when he was beginning his ministry in Saskatchewan:

When I looked for my ministry position in rural Saskatchewan, I heard advice such as: "The rural areas are quite different from St. Andrew's College;" "You should be careful when talking about racism;" and "You should be cautious when talking about Colten Boushie." I also know it. Trust me, I can feel it as a newly arrived Asian migrant. Even though I would like

to stand up boldly, probably I cannot and may not do it for my own survival. Perhaps I will be one of only five Asian people in the town. So, dear White Christians, especially White ministers, I dare to ask you, beg you to use your White privilege. Use it to make a difference. Please stand up a little more boldly. Please speak up a little more publicly. Make a safer space that I can for the reparation work. As a humble non-White settler, I, too, would like to be part of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

What Hoeun Lee was hearing in the 'advice' comes from a fear based on a maintaining the system, a don't rock the boat mentality. It is often meant to be supportive as well as to protect the person, but often is paternalistic. I experienced this when I was told to be careful and not come out in the church as I began my ministry. This is the opposite of Jesus' instruction – do not fear.

Do not fear because God is with you

Do not fear because God has counted every hair on your head

Do not fear because God knows the sparrows when they fall and you are far more valuable than the sparrow

Do not fear because God's love is stronger than hate

Do not fear because supporting the dignity of every human being is more important than sustaining a system that denies that humanity.

The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs did not fear standing up for their rights and they now have a [new agreement](#) for negotiating title rights for their territory. And you may be thinking but there were the elected chiefs who had concerns about that agreement, so know that the elected chiefs are a result of the structure set up by the colonial Indian Act. There is much more to the story, so we need to educate ourselves. Are we willing to do that?

Can we take up the mantle of calling out racism? Of educating ourselves and listening to our indigenous neighbours? Of doing the hard work of anti-racism? I invite us to take some time in breakout rooms to discuss these questions or what is on your heart about these issues.

As we move through these challenging times, may we be open to listening to one another, to indigenous and racialized people as we seek to understand, learn and act. Do not fear, God is with us, as we seek to bring the kingdom of love and justice.