

**Summerland United Church**  
**September 29, 2024**  
**Theme: The United Church Call and Vision: Daring Justice**

**Threshold** For the next three weeks we will spend time with the United Church of Canada's Call and Vision Statement. We have spent time with this Call Statement before, back in the spring of 2023, as we discerned what the statements: Daring Justice, Deep Spirituality, and Bold Discipleship mean to us here at Summerland United.

As we prepare to move into our shared space with our Anglican friends, it is important we do so grounded in our faith, and in the way the United Church expresses our faith. This week we begin with Daring Justice which we tie together with remembering and honouring the children were forced to attend church-run residential institutions. We will do this through words, actions, and silence and a simple message from Dukdukdiya, the hummingbird.

We also hope to affirm that the God of compassion is with us in our despair, heartache, and grief; we are never alone. God has told us, "I will never forget you, my children; I have carved you in the palm of my hand."

**Opening Prayer**

Today, may we share the work and responsibility of worshipping our Creator while honouring each other.

May all who come to worship drink freely of the Living Water. A Living Water, that like love, transforms and changes depending on where we are, but never goes away.

And may that Living Water, like mighty ever-flowing streams, sustain us into the work of love, justice, and reconciliation.

And may that Living Water, sometimes just a single drop, give us the strength to do what we can. With our commitment and the Spirit's guidance, may it be so.  
Amen

**Silence**, light a candle

**Gathering Together:** Flight of the Hummingbird video

**Scripture:** Luke 18:15–17, from First Nations Version, New Testament

*Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it holds for you on this day.*

The people were bringing their little children to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) so he would lay his hands on them and bless them, but his followers spoke harsh words to the ones bringing them. So Creator Sets Free said to them, "Let the little children come to me! Do not turn them away. Creator's good road belongs to the ones who are like these children. I speak from my heart, unless you welcome Creator's good road in the way a little child does, you will never walk it."

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

## Silence

*Light a candle followed by one minute of silence.*

## Reflection

It hurts to pair this story of unconditional love of Children by Jesus with the honouring of children taken to residential institutions. It hurts because so many children did not experience this unconditional love, despite being at church-run institutions. How did we Christians go so very wrong in the interpretation of scripture that we have this horrific legacy to live with? I don't know the answer to this. Some respond, they thought they were doing their best?

Perhaps this is true. Canada, being so heavily influence by the British upper classes did believe being sent away to boarding school was the best thing for children. We know the history of English boarding schools believed in the 'stiff upper lip' notions and that somehow suffering made you a better person. And perhaps that was the original intentions. However, we also know that when stories of abuse, poor hygiene practices, awful health care practices and intentional malnutrition came to light. No one (or very few people) did anything to change the practices. Somehow all of these practices that let children die and be buried in unmarked graves were permissible, because of racism, bigotry and twisted Christian belief.

Perhaps, some say, we can't judge people of the past based on what we know today. Which I whole heartily disagree with. If we give people this free pass, we learn nothing. If we say, they didn't know any better, while maybe true, it doesn't require us to take any responsibility as inheritors of those past actions.

Well, some might say, it wasn't me who did that? It's not my fault, and not my problem. Again, we are the inheritors of those actions and we are living within the legacy of what residential institutions did to generations of indigenous people. How many of us grew up hearing things like, lazy Indian, just want a free handout, they're all drunkards?

I did. And it wasn't until a was much older and began learning about the history of residential institutions that is dawned on me. Those ways of being – those ways that we judge are the result of generations of trauma. The trauma of being taken from loving families, of growing up not experiencing love or family life, abuse, hunger, pain and suffering. Then to be dropped back in communities you aren't connected with emotionally and can't connect to because you've never experienced it. Then also knowing that any children you have will experience the same upbringing. It's trauma, pure and simple.

When all of this began to come into light because of people like Willy Blackwater, and The United Church of Canada had choice. They could have denied the stories that came from indigious residents of the institutions, as many did (and still do) they could have said, it's in the past lets move on, or they could have said: yes you're telling the truth and we will listen to you.

Which was the hardest choice – and it was **Daring**. Because much of Canada and the world wanted to pretend it didn't happen. And it was **Just** because it began to return dignity to people from whom the church had stripped all dignity. The truth and reconciliation commission began in 2008 and worked until 2015 collecting stories and hearing the truth about our countries history with it indigenous people. But the work is not complete. Healing from trauma doesn't happen overnight, and certainly won't for people carrying generations of trauma.

Residential institutions existed in Canada for 150 years, which in my mind means at least 150 years of healing will be needed, probably more. Which feels ridiculously overwhelming and impossible to sustain.

So I think of two things when this comes to mind. I think of Dukdukdiya – doing what she can. Contributing in the way she can. If all the animals do what they can, then a little becomes a lot.

And I think about this story of Jesus and the children, and him telling the adults that they need to be like children to walk the good road. So just what does that mean? Do we need to be childish? Immature? No. I don't think so at all. Children are naturally curious, naturally full of wonder and innocence – when they grow up in healthy nurturing environments. They are naturally loving and friendly. What always strikes me as important about this story is its context, which is often left out. Prior to the children arriving Jesus and his followers are discussing some heavy topics – arrogance, power, infidelity, and injustice. Directly after this story of the children's arrival Jesus talks about what is needed to inherit eternal life.

Injustice – to walking the good road like a child – to inheriting the kingdom of God. Jesus quotes the commandments and reminds them that with the help of the Great Spirit (God) all can walk the great road and be set free. Inheriting Gods kingdom isn't easy. It doesn't seem as though the world we live in really wants to do the hard work of equality, a thriving eco-system or liberation from oppression. But it is the inheritance we're given as children of God, just as we are given the inheritance of the residential institutions as Canadians and members of a church that supported them.

But by bringing them together and recognizing that in and among the seriousness of life, a little bit of play and a lot of curious wonder, we can intertwine these two inheritances by Daring to be Just. Daring to say, I'm sorry, I'm here, I'll listen and just like Dukdukdiya I'll do what I can.