

September 30th, 2020

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 2: 3-4a

This reading was one of our Scripture readings from this past Sunday and it has stayed with me since. I keep hearing these words in my mind and my heart and today as I sat down to write this devotion, they were front and centre again. Many of you will know that today (September 30th) is orange shirt day. Orange shirt day began in Williams Lake, B.C in 2013; it is a day when we remember and honour the indigenous children who were sent to residential schools in Canada and it is an opportunity for us all to learn more about that history. We in The United Church of Canada have a profound and deeply connected history with the residential school system. Our church, and the denominations who formed the United Church in 1925, operated and ran schools across this country; our history is steep in the shadow of those schools. Whether we like to talk about it or not, we must recognize that we were active participants in a system that intentionally and deliberately sought to colonize and assimilate the indigenous peoples of this country in a horrendous and often abusive manner. The residential school system, from its foundation, was steeped in racist ideology and systemic oppression which sought to destroy the cultural norms, languages and practises of countless people; the results of which are still painfully present today and likely will be for generations to come.

This morning as I drank my morning coffee, I reflected on how easy it is to ignore and overshadow painful histories such as this. I have no doubt that for many this day will pass without notice. I, nor anyone else, can force another to wear an orange shirt or to take time to learn more about the history of the residential school system and our denominations role in it; yet I cannot escape, nor do I want to, the words of St. Paul to a community in Philippi written so many years ago. St. Paul reminds us that faith calls of us to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. St. Paul reminds us that our faith calls us to regard others as better than ourselves, yet this history, that we all share, stands in complete opposition to that call; it stands in opposition to what we hold as the tenants of our faith. We must recognize that and we must seek to do better.

If you would like to learn more about orange shirt day and the story behind it, then I would encourage you to check out the links that I have left below. These are both short videos explaining the history of this day and Phyllis Webstad’s story about her orange shirt. If you would like to learn more about what we can all do each and everyday to not only remember, but work towards reconciliation then I would invite you to check to explore further education available on The United Church of Canada website, including a downloadable PDF copy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls to action. <https://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/reconciliation-and-indigenous-justice/truth-and-reconciliation>

(Phyllis Webstad’s story) <https://youtu.be/E3vUqr01kAk>

(CBC News clip from Williams Lake, B.C) <https://youtu.be/Il1pUrK29MM>

The steps we take towards reconciliation today, even the smallest of steps like putting on an orange shirt, make the world a better place tomorrow and gives us all a chance to practise our faith in way that

no longer solely benefits our selfish ambitions, but rather seeks to offer unconditional hope and love in the ways that Jesus taught and lived out.

Sincerely

Rev. Adam Hall