

## **Thursday in the Seventh Week after Pentecost July 23, 2020**

The chief priest and the religious leaders of the nation sent men armed with swords and clubs out of the city of Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane with Judas, one of the twelve closest followers of Jesus. After Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek, these armed men arrested Jesus and took him away. Except for Simon Peter, all of the other followers of Jesus fled, scattering into the darkness. Simon Peter kept his distance but followed the armed soldiers to the courtyard to witness what was about to happen.

### **Read Matthew 26:69-75. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?**

A servant girl recognized Simon Peter among those gathered in the courtyard. Another woman in the crowd also recognized Simon Peter. Finally, some bystanders recognized him as someone who spoke with the accent of a Galilean like many other dissidents in the land. Each time, Simon Peter denied that he knew Jesus, each time more emphatically. When Simon Peter remembered that his Teacher had predicted how Simon Peter would react during that night after his arrest, Simon Peter cried and cried and cried, more uncontrollably with each remembrance of each denial.

In the prayer which Jesus taught us, we pray, “Deliver us from evil and save us from the time of trial.” None of us wants to be put in a position in which evil will overwhelm us and destroy us. Yet many in Canada encounter evil every day and seek justice. It is very tempting to try to avoid confrontation and to become invisible among the crowds.

### **Read Matthew 26:69-75. What is God communicating to us in this reading?**

In the first two Sacred Teachings podcasts for Season 3 on the Anglican Church of Canada, a journalist asks the Primate Archbishop Linda Nicolls and the National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald about the presence of sin in this world and in our personal lives. Each defines sin as being separated from God: Creator, Word, and Great Spirit. As part of this world, each of us is separated from God by the ways in which we organize our social, political and economic relationships that establishes and perpetuates inequalities between people. System violence happens in the way that we think about and see Creator’s creation and the resources available in the land, waters, and air. The history of how Settlers have sought to dehumanize Indigenous Peoples issues into racist actions, based on convictions of Indigenous Peoples as “heathen” in need of conversion to exploitative forms of Christianity or as “savages” to be conquered and subjugated or as “children” to be treated as incompetent and in need of ongoing efforts to acculturate or as “wards of the state” to be perpetually fed, provided water, clothed, educated, kept healthy, and watched carefully by the police to keep Canadians safe. Chronic underfunding by federal and provincial governments in education, health care, child well-being, and housing while other Canadians have access to better funded basic services are also evidence of systemic racism. The practice of establishing and maintaining small plots of land reserved for First Nations or of neglecting Metis communities or compelling migrations of Inuit communities also demonstrate systemic racism. Personal experiences of unkind statements, emotional abuse, spiritual harm, and bodily injury are instances of what is more commonly identified as examples of racism. Both the Primate Linda Nicolls and Archbishop Mark MacDonald affirmed the importance of connecting with God: Creator, Word, and Great Spirit in order to resist evil and work towards making changes in our corporate and personal lives.

When I attended theological school beginning in 1980, I found myself challenged by some students preparing for ministry and by some members of the Board of Directors of the College. In classes and in conversations in a variety of settings, I shared my acceptance of gays and lesbians since I had known about how a maternal uncle had been rejected by everyone in his family except his youngest sister who was my mother. My faith was called into question. My lack of silence introduced me to a nasty side of people and knowledge of the systems in place which did not respect these sexual orientations and discriminated against those who Creator made that way. The Church was one of those systems which regarded gays and lesbians let alone bisexual, transgendered, Two Spirited, and queer people.

In my first parish, I encountered women who had been emotionally and physically abused or sexually assaulted. In parts of this parish, people appreciated my reflections and preaching against domestic violence and the need for consent to be given in sexual relationships whatever the sexual orientation of the participants. In other parts of this parish, people did not want the status quo to be challenged by their priest.

In my second parish, I discovered a leadership group who were selective in which parishioners of colour were respected. After an adult child who accompanied her mother to church for twenty years died of a lifelong medical condition and I had provided pastoral care to the family, this adult child was to be honoured at the annual parish celebration for the saint by a special cake made by the grieving mother. The woman who had been in charge for years and years of obtaining a special cake and cutting it into pieces to feed the gathered crowd was informed about this gift and its meaning for this mother. However, as the crowds began to leave, I noticed that this gift had not been cut and distributed first as I had asked. The grieving mother was circling the table. I asked for the gift to be cut and distributed but this was not done. I cut the cake myself and distributed it. However, the damage had been done. The grieving mother did not return to worship again.

In my work as a social worker over twenty years, I was thrust into relationships with Indigenous Peoples. My ordination to the priesthood was not an asset widely accepted. Indigenous colleagues were cautious in working with me. Some were very anxious, especially those who had attended residential schools or knew someone close to them who continued to struggle with various forms of trauma. It took time and effort to build trust so that our working relationship to develop. Attendance at Wednesday morning smudge ceremonies and open reflections in weekly circles. Participation in quarterly cultural training outdoors for a day or periodic teachings in the sacred long house with Elders also built relationships. Working collaboratively as colleagues with children, youth, families, and resource caregivers expanded relationships, honouring each other's intentions and efforts. Involvement at annual Native Child and Family Services of Toronto Pow Wows were always exciting ceremonies and opportunities to affirm friendships which developed over time.

In denying that he knew the Teacher who had brought healing into his life and challenged him with a new vision about Creator's presence and ongoing work within creation, Simon Peter suffered when he did not speak out and admit that his friendship with the Teacher mattered.

### **Read Matthew 26: 69-75. What is God asking us to be and do?**

We continue to live in difficult times. Religious institutions have perpetuated systemic forms of discrimination. Religious leaders have contributed to more personal experiences of hatred and violence.

In his anguish, Simon Peter came to realize that he had more to learn about what Creator was doing in the world before he could find his voice.

Connect with Creator. Develop relationships with those who continue to bear the brutality of social, political, and economic systems. Find your voice to speak about Creator's generosity and the value of Creator's creation, particularly about the value of each Human Being.