

Thursday in the Fourteenth Week after Pentecost September 10, 2020

After spending some time on the banks of the River Jordan where his cousin had been preaching and baptizing those who were seeking to move forward in a new way in their relationship with Creator and the Great Spirit, Jesus begins to journey back to Jerusalem. On his way, Jesus learns that his friend Lazarus is gravely ill and dies.

Read John 11:17-46. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?

When Jesus arrives at Bethany, he discovers that his friend Lazarus has been laying in his tomb for four days. The sisters of Lazarus have washed his body, anointed it, and wrapped it in strips of linen cloth. Friends and extended family have gathered to sit shiva for the week to express their sorrow, discuss the loss of their loved one, and to begin to re-enter the larger community in a new normal.

The sister Martha who is known as the one who focuses on the tasks to be completed and responsibilities to be kept leaves the family home and comes to meet Jesus on her own. Her greeting acknowledges Jesus as One who asks Creator to heal and then heals the sick. Jesus tells Martha, **“Your brother will rise from the dead again.” John 11:23.** Like others among the Hebrew People, Martha believes that at the end of time, when the Anointed One is sent by Creator, the Righteous Ones will rise from the dead. Jesus challenges Martha to take another step forward in her journey of faith. Jesus tells Martha, **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:23,24.** Martha responds in a straightforward way, **“Yes Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, God’s only Son, the One who is coming into the world!” John 11:27.** Martha has watched Jesus teach, heal, and perform signs pointing to Creator’s work in bringing a new age into being. For Martha, it is a no-brainer that Jesus is the One sent by Creator and that Jesus has the authority and power to bring new life into being. Martha leaves to talk to her sister.

Mary leaves the family home accompanied by others from the community and goes to the place where her sister had spoken to Jesus. As Mary has done in the past, Mary kneels at the feet of Jesus, gives him the same message that Martha had communicated, and weeps. Those with Mary also cry. Impacted by the pain of their grief, Jesus too becomes deeply disturbed and troubled. Jesus also cries but asks to be led to the tomb where Lazarus lies cleansed and bound in death.

At the tomb, Martha points out the obvious. Lazarus is truly dead and has been for four days.

When the stone in front of the tomb is rolled away, Jesus talks to Creator, naming Creator as the Source of his own life...Father...and claiming to be the Father’s Son sent into the world at that time. Jesus shouts out for all to hear, **“Lazarus. Come out!” John 11:43.** Lazarus appears on his feet at the opening of the tomb wrapped in strips of linen cloth. To the sisters and the community gathered, Jesus says, **“Untie him and let him go.” John 11: 44.**

The Teacher is very clear in his message. Creator has sent him and he has the authority and power with which Creator rules and brings new life into being.

Read John 11:17-46. What is God saying to us in this story?

Creator is very generous, providing all that we need and creating new life so that we can be truly free of all that binds us.

Over coffee in a cafe with a friend on Dog Creek Reserve in April 2013, Phyllis Webstad pondered what she might say to the media at the launch of the St. Joseph's Mission Residential School Commemoration coinciding with the Truth and Reconciliation national efforts to gather residential school survivors to share their stories. Phyllis Webstad decided to speak about her first day attending residential school in September 1973. Phyllis Webstad was born on Dog Creek Reserve about 85 km south of William's Lake in central British Columbia but is a member of Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation (Canoe Creek Indian Band of the Northern Secwepemc People). In preparation for her first day of residential school, her grandmother took her shopping so she could pick out a new shirt to wear. Phyllis Webstad saw an orange tee-shirt that was bright and exciting, reflecting her feelings about going to a new school. However, when Phyllis Webstad arrived at St. Joseph's Mission Residential School, her new orange shirt was taken away from her since it represented a piece of her heart connected to her life at home with her Indigenous family. Phyllis Webstad felt terrorized. This was the first of many other traumas which she experienced during the year that she first spent away from her extended family. On the first day of residential school, Phyllis Webstad concluded that her life didn't matter.

From 1831 to 1996, more than 150,000 children attended some 130 church-operated residential schools from coast to coast to coast. Sir John A. MacDonald explained the purpose of these residential schools, saying, "The objective is to take the Indian out of the child." This was the foundation of a policy of aggressive assimilation in the newly created confederation of Canada which could not be accomplished if Indigenous children went to day schools and returned to their families at the end of each day. Chief Justice and Senator Murray Sinclair with the Truth and Reconciliation Report identified this form of systemic racism as cultural genocide. For generations on the first day of residential school, clothing given to them by grandmothers and extended family members were taken away and replaced by school uniforms. Hair was cut to basic styles worn by Europeans. Medicine bundles were removed. Jewelry and beadwork were destroyed. Children were showered in common shower rooms. Each child was given a name and number. Punishments were administered when children spoke their language. Boys and girls were separated, sleeping on beds in dormitory rooms. European foods were served irregardless of the foods eaten by their families in living off the land and waters. Their lives were regimented and rules were enforced vigorously. Children learned to be ashamed of their language, cultural heritage, and spiritual practices. Children learned to keep silence about the brutality and abuse to which they were subjected. Each of Phyllis Webstad's grandparents attended residential schools for ten months of the year and their parents were forbidden to visit them during the school year.

After making the decision to speak about her experiences of residential school, the local union for the Caribou Regional District Board asked permission two days later to arrange an Orange Shirt Day at the end of the month during which children returned for school. At a Truth and Reconciliation gathering in Vancouver, an Elder described September as the "crying month". Indigenous children cried and were not consoled. By the end of the month of April 2013, the idea was presented at a professional

development day for educators. A Presbyterian Minister in attendance was inspired and promoted Orange Shirt Day September 30 at a Truth and Reconciliation gathering in Vancouver. On a flyer, the message read, "WEAR AN ORANGE SHIRT TO HONOUR THE CHILDREN WHO SURVIVED INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO DIDN'T." On the front of these bright shirts, a circle of hands surrounds the message, "EVERY CHILD MATTERS".

100 Orange Shirts have been ordered and will arrive at some time in September 2020 for distribution for the last week in the month. Contact David Franks on his cell phone at 905-715-9997 or by email at davidapfranks@gmail.com if you are interested.

Read John 11:17-46. What is God asking us to be and do?

Listen to or read the stories told by residential school survivors. Celebrate the new life which these survivors are experiencing demonstrating resiliency. Pray for the survivors of residential schools who continue to find it very difficult to share what happened to them and struggle with feelings of shame.

Read the article SURVIVOR in Canadian Geographic May/June 2020 by Lisa Charleyboy with photography by Ben Powless.

Read THE REASON YOU WALK: A MEMOIR by Wab Kinew, Penguin Random House, 2015.

Read UP GHOST RIVER: A CHIEF'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE TURBULENT WATERS OF NATIVE HISTORY by Edmund Matatawabin, Knopf Canada, 2014.