

Thursday in the Fifteenth Week after Pentecost: September 17, 2020

Jesus leaves the synagogue in Nazareth after he read the passage from the prophet Isaiah pointing out that Creator's Spirit had anointed him and proclaiming the year of Creator's favour had begun. Jesus claims to have good news to share so he sets out for Capernaum in Galilee and plans to speak at the local synagogue on the Sabbath.

Read Luke 4:31-37. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

When Jesus stands to speak, he listens when a member of this synagogue screams at him out of his anguish. Mental illness is terrible to encounter when the person is in so much pain and communicates clearly that they are bound by their ideas and feelings, unable to get free of their despair and give direction to their life. In this generation in urban settings, a crisis assessment is available through the local hospital and medication can be prescribed by a psychiatrist so that a person can be in a better position to benefit from counselling. Addictions supports are also available for people in crisis from a variety of community-based resources. Professional help can be found depending on the source of the anguish and the resources known to the person in pain. Some extended family members and friends sometimes provide an emotional affirmation of the person's importance and place in their lives. Sometimes, the leadership and members of worshipping communities can provide light and be an anchor through a place of safety. In this gospel reading, the person in anguish knows that Jesus has the authority and the means to create new life and begin healing. Jesus addresses the source of the person's anguish. Jesus then does what Creator and the Great Spirit have sent him to do. Jesus creates the opportunity for healing to begin in a very decisive moment in space and time. For the author of Luke's gospel, Jesus is the Holy One sent by Creator to bring good news, to proclaim release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to liberate the oppressed.

It is sad that those who witnessed this healing are shaken and struggle with what Jesus did for this person in profound anguish. Jesus frees this person so that the one who was bound and oppressed can cope with their pain. Jesus gives this person a precious gift to move forward in creating a new normal and benefit from those who are there for support.

It is very sad to acknowledge that some in the crowd will use Creator's generosity for their own purposes.

In either case, word about what Jesus is doing on the Sabbath travels far and wide.

Read Luke 4:31-37. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Orange Shirt Day is set aside for September 30 each year in order to support Indigenous survivors of residential schools established by colonial governments and then the federal government of Canada following Confederation in the period from 1831 to 1996. Their purpose was to assimilate the Indigenous Peoples, attempting to destroy their cultural and spiritual practices. Churches operated these institutions, harming individuals, destroying families, and implementing forms of cultural genocide.

In January 1948, Rene Meshake was born in a small hospital in the railway town of Nakina about 60 km north of a gold mining town of Geraldton north of Lake Superior. His mother and her family were from Long Lake 58 First Nation east of Geraldton. His father and his family were from Aroland First Nation about 20 km west of Nakina. Both parents were Anishinaabe, speaking their language and living according to their cultural practices of their ancestors. Unfortunately, each parent contracted tuberculosis when Rene Meshake was three years old and were hospitalized in the sanatorium in Fort William, now part of Thunder Bay. His maternal grandparents became his caregivers. His younger brother went to live with his paternal grandparents. His Nookomis (maternal grandmother) was a respected Elder in the community so she took him out onto the land and waters to live for various lengths of time, introducing him to relatives and friends in the bush. The grandmothers in his life worked to provide for their families, telling stories to all of the children gathered around them to learn. The children would listen and then go outside to draw in the dirt and play according to the stories which they heard. Often, the girls built little communities out of mud, inviting the boys to enter into the stories and play. The rain would come and wash away all of the art and then the children would start over again. Rene Meshake identifies these activities as woodland art and enjoyed exploring his gifts in drawing. His Mishoomis (maternal grandfather) also took him out in the canoe to learn how to fish and get to the traplines, teaching him to sing to the water, the fish, the rocks, the trees, the winged creatures, and the animals as well as to listen to their songs. As a child, Rene Meshake was also recognized as being a story-teller. Traditionally, the Anishinaabe were known as the People of the Forest so they learned from their elders how to hunt, fish, harvest berries, and grow plants for food and medicines, respecting the gifts Creator provided for their sustenance.

Settlers introduced the Anishinaabe to trading posts, railroad maintenance, logging, mining, tree planting, forest fire management, stores, churches, educators, and European medical practitioners. As a result, Rene Meshake was introduced to day schools in Longlac and Aroland. The church had forbidden the use of the drum and the pipigwan (traditional flute) as well as gatherings for Pow Wows. In these day schools, Rene Meshake learned to use crayons to express himself. However, his teachers gave him opportunities to draw but asked him to draw pictures that did not include images of birds or fish or animals or anything pertaining to his life on the land and waters of his Peoples traditional territories. His stories and songs which he learned from his maternal grandparents were also suppressed. At 10 years of age, Rene Meshake was sent to McIntosh Indian Residential School near Kenora, about 11 hours by train west of Longlac. His gifts in music, art, and story-telling were further suppressed. The messages that he received repeatedly said, "Your art is inferior." and "This is art. The way that you do art is inferior". In listening to piano practices, Rene Meshake wondered what it would be like to learn to write music to play on the piano, giving expression to the music of his ancestors but he never made it to his second piano lesson until much later in life. He was sexually abused and lost his energy to learn piano. At 13 years of age, Rene Meshake attended high school in Thunder Bay which was about 3 hours west along the highway from Longlac. In high school, Rene Meshake learned how to get A's for his arts by presenting European artwork so he could attend Sheridan College in Toronto.

In Toronto, Rene Meshake lost his way through alcohol abuse and became homeless for a number of years before getting to a place in his life where he sought healing through an Indigenous addictions and rehabilitation centre. At his second piano lesson, he cried before he could play.

Rene Meshake wonders what would have happened if the gifts given by Creator to Indigenous children and youth would have been nourished by the various religious authorities and educators on his journey.

Read Luke 4: 31-37. What is God calling us to be and do?

Listen to or read about the stories and poetry of Indigenous people who have survived residential schools. Seek healing for experiences which have diminished you in any way. Share what you have learned with others on a similar journey.

Read Rene Meshake's book INJICHAAG: MY SOUL IN STORY published by University of Manitoba Press in 2019 for artwork, poetry, and stories of the stages in his life. Rene Meshake began to be free of his addictions on a day by day basis after eight months in rehabilitation in Pedahbun Lodge about thirty years ago. From a vision, Rene Meshake took the Spirit Name Papawangani, Anishinaabemowin from papaw meaning quiver and wangani meaning wings. Rene Meshake imagines himself quivering his wings to shake off the McIntosh Indian Residential School legacy so that his son will not experience the shame that he felt.

David Franks