

1 Samuel 8: 4-11, (12-15), 16-20; (Psalm 138) 2 Corinthians 4: 13-5: 1; Mark 3: 20-35

Last weekend, the news broke about the discovery of a mass grave of 215 Indigenous children, some as young as 3 years old, who had been forced into a residential school in Kamloops, BC. There have been posts and articles about this everywhere online, and many major news sources, nationally and internationally, have been reporting on it, so I'm sure you've heard about it by now. I would guess you've felt some kind of reaction to all of this, too. This is devastating and heart-breaking, and I've heard from some of you about how difficult this is to hear, the anger and outrage you're feeling about it, and the sadness you're feeling as well. And I completely agree. This is an atrocity, and it shouldn't have happened.

But thing is, this really isn't news. Or, at least, it's not "new". Indigenous people have been telling us about the horrors faced in residential schools, many of which left children permanently scarred, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. They had experiments run on them, particularly to see what nutrition – or lack thereof – can do to a child. Many died, either at the hands of their captors, from preventable illness, from starvation, or from running away and being unable to survive in the elements. Many families never found out what happened to their children, and were left wondering. There are countless stories of abuse that have been shared, particularly while the Truth and Reconciliation Committee was preparing its report. For so many Indigenous people, although this is upsetting, and grief accompanies it, this wasn't a surprise. It is well-known that residential schools ripped children away from their families, with the goal to make them forget their language and culture and adapt to white culture, often through violent means. Some estimate that between 15 000 and 25 000 children died in residential schools. Another statistic I saw estimated that the odds of children dying in residential school was 1 in 25, while the odds of Canadians dying while serving in World War II was 1 in 26. To put that another way, Canadians serving in World War II had a better survival rate than children forced to go to residential schools.

And as much as this isn't really "new", it's not really "old" either. We may want to say this is a dark chapter in our Canadian history, but the thing is, it's still happening. The last residential school in Canada closed within my lifetime, and likely within most of your living memory, in 1996. It also happened pretty much in our own backyard, with a residential school located in Shubenacadie. The people who attended residential school are very much still alive, and very much suffering from the impacts of it. There's also something called "generational trauma", meaning that what was suffered in residential schools can be passed on to the generations after, who may not have experienced it themselves, but who still suffer the lingering effects of residential schools. And there are still many ways in which we settlers continue to harm the Indigenous peoples of this land. Many of the Indigenous people, even in Canada, don't have access to basic resources. I was shocked to find out that the reserve in Pictou didn't have access to fresh water because of a pulp and paper mill that was actively pouring toxins into their water resources up until last year. I doubt that water is safe yet. There are countless Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), whose names are unknown, stories untold, and who authorities barely search for, something that's ongoing to this day. There are more issues than this facing our Indigenous friends and neighbours, and for too long we've ignored all of them. Not only did we, as Christians, ignore it, but the church – including the Anglican Church of Canada – was active in creating and maintaining residential schools. That's something

we cannot forget. The loving Saviour that we follow, who encourages us to love one another, care for one another, and to treat all of God's children with respect, had his message twisted in the walls of residential schools, and it was used to harm and abuse many children. Just as there was a corrupt ruler in our first reading today, we have had corrupt rulers in our past, and corrupt leaders continue to exist in our world today. But, just as we heard in our gospel today, "if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." We, as a nation, need to stand together with the Indigenous people of this land on which we live, and to give them the respect – not to mention honour the basic rights – that they deserve.

It may be hard to hear these things, and it's even harder to speak up and fight against them. But, as George Takei put it, "We cannot move forward until we acknowledge the atrocities of the past." Even when it's painful, maybe even especially when it's painful, these things need to come forward. Not for a day, not for a week, not even for a month, like Indigenous History month, which we celebrate this month, but continually. In many ways, our system is broken and needs to be repaired, and that will make many of us uncomfortable. As Bryson Sili'pay put it, actively addressing these things "is going to make you 100% uncomfortable at times and will make you question everything in your life. Be prepared to be uneasy. Be prepared to step up." We cannot allow this to be forgotten, and we cannot carry on the way we have. We need to do better. We need to be better. Talking about these atrocities and finding ways to repair and rebuild the relationships with our Indigenous siblings cannot be something we do half-heartedly, or a trend that disappears again. Reconciliation has become a buzz word, and it is not enough. We have not done enough, we continue not to do enough, and all I can pray is that (through prayer AND action), we can begin to do enough.

In closing, I'd like to share with you a song that was written by my friend and colleague Rick Gunn, as his response to this recent discovery.