

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 21st, 2017

Seeking Right Relations



A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Prayer: O Holy One, we want to have good relationships with each other, with our neighbours and particularly with you O God. Guide our thoughts and words now as we reflect on these relationships. Open our hearts and minds for your word to us today. Amen.

Seeking right relations ----- what comes to mind for you? You have probably noticed the native theme in our service. In the current context we are concerned about our relations with First Nations people.

Seeking right relations with our First Nations brothers and sisters is very important and a particular passion of mine. I feel it in my heart and soul. I have been blessed with some very unique opportunities to engage with others on this journey. These experiences have blessed me but I know there is much more I could be doing. Sometimes we can't create an opportunity but we can be open to responding. So I just want to explore this with you a little this morning, it is such a big topic. I think it takes a life-time even generations!

One of the common bonds between our denominations is the sincere desire to seek right relations with First Nations people. For years the United Church has been endeavouring to understand and live into "The 1986 Apology to First Nations People" offered by the Right Reverend Bob Smith. We have some good connections with First Nations people. The All Native Circle is one of the 13 Conferences that form the United Church. Here in BC the First Nations folk are integrated into our governance structure and have a unique voice and visible presence in the gatherings. This may sound like they have conformed to our way but the relationship is much richer than that.

This United Church worship resource [Gathering](#) for the season of Lent and Easter had many resources for exploring right relations so I have used some of them today.

It has been a privilege to experience Bishop Logan's commitment to the year of Reconciliation. Some of us participated in his walk last April and he has continued to walk the talk of reconciliation. The Bishop always begins with an acknowledgement of the territory where we are meeting. This is what [Gathering](#) says about that:

“Acknowledging the territory where we gather and the people who have traditionally called it home for thousands of years is a way to continue to live out the church’s Apologies to the First Peoples of North America. The acknowledgement supports our calls to others to pay respect to Indigenous peoples. It is also one way the church can work toward right relations—by repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery that assumed the land was empty when European explorers, traders, and settlers first came. In order to promote mutual respect, peace, and friendship, the 40th General Council 2009 encouraged the recognition of Traditional Territory of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples at the gatherings of the courts and pastoral charges.”
(Gathering L/E 2017 year A p. 68)

So we acknowledge the ancestral lands Snuneymuxw people, but what do you know about the Snuneymuxw people? This is a small quote about their land from the website:

www.mediaindigena.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/treaties.png

The Snuneymuxw are a vibrant First Nation of the Coast Salish People, located in the center of Coast Salish territory on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Fraser River in the Canadian province of British Columbia.

Snuneymuxw territory encompasses one of the most productive and resource rich areas at the heart of the Salish Sea.

The responsibility of stewardship over such productive lands has raised up generations of hard working People. The Snuneymuxw are engaged politically, socially, and economically, as we seek to develop common pathways to prosperity in the region respectful of our enduring connection to our territories.

The Snuneymuxw First Nation is one of the largest Nations in B.C. with a population of over 1,700 people. We are one of the few Nations that have a pre-Confederation treaty with the Crown – the Treaty of 1854. Unfortunately, it has been systematically undermined, ignored and dishonoured by the Crown and as a result we currently live on the smallest reserve land base per capita of any First Nation in British Columbia.

How can we improve our relationship with these neighbours? Sally Robinson and MJ Paterson are going to gather interested folk to work on this. Stay tuned you will have another opportunity to seek right relations.

This past week I spent five days with the Bishop and many Anglican folk talking about reconciling relationships. Last Saturday the workshop, called “Dialogue for Peaceful Change” facilitated by Teri Murphy and Shona Bell from the Corrymeela. Established in response to the conflict between Ireland and Northern Ireland, Corrymeela is Northern Ireland’s oldest peace and reconciliation organization with a residential center in Ballycastle. These women were delightful and I really enjoyed watching them work. So we talked about conflict styles and reconciliation.

Bishop Logan has promoted the year of reconciliation and he took time to explain what it means to him. As Bishop he has been able to meet with Band chiefs and begin connections but it seems most congregations do not have easy connections. So what does reconciliation mean for local congregations? Yes, with First Nations relations are important but what about reconciliation in our churches and in our lives. The conversations changed to talking about our understanding of

reconciliation and what it means in our work at the congregation level. The pre-reading for the Clergy Conference was **reconcile** by John Paul Lederach.

Bishop Logan sent us a copy to read. This is a great book and you can borrow it. Many quotes but one to share “ *Reconciliation is restoring and healing the torn apart web of relationships.*”

One of the interesting illustrations was given by Shona, she drew a curve showing the escalating conflict and then how it kind of resolved over time, underneath there was a big iceberg of misinformation and old stories about the conflict. I recently had a similar experience.

I met my friend in 2000 in Smithers and we had a great time together. I even presided at her wedding, so we became friends as couples too. Kris had lots in common with her new husband. They moved to the island about a year after Kris and I did. We saw each other when we could and our paths crossed often. About 6 years ago she ended our relationship. No contact , no response to emails or phone calls, so I stopped trying. Then a week ago her husband called to say she was seriously ill and perhaps I wanted to know. Of course Kris and I went right away and she was very glad to see me and we just agreed not to go back, just take the opportunity to be friends from here on. Some people who know both of us and the fractured relationship won't know we have reconciled our relationship unless I share the good news, in a positive way.

Think about how this relates to your church community. You have come a long way in reconciling this relationship. **Reconciliation means we remember and we change.** We move on in a new way. We have worked hard at reconciliation here in this church community between the two denominations. Work that we can celebrate BUT you must continue to work on healthy relationships and continue to build community. Have you shared the good news? Some community folk may still be holding on to stories of discord and even gossip ---never on Gabriola!! Sharing the good news about the church community is important. I hope there is a big write-up in the Sounder about our new name and why!!

Right relations with our neighbours, with our families and with God are all important aspects of right relations. Of course there is another sermon or two in this statement, but that can be another day.

Most important is our relation with God. In the readings from Acts and John 14, we are reminded that *with God we live and move and have our being.* God is present in each of us because we are created in the likeness of God. God values diversity. God is committed to giving us freedom. These elements make our lives rich, ever-renewing and interesting. They also make conflict a natural part of our relationships (reconcile p.68)

We are commissioned to love our neighbours as God loves us. We have the opportunity to seek right relations and to change and improve the relations. The Spirit of truth stands with you and you are able to do more than you can ask or imagine. Thanks be to God. Amen