

Happy Birthday United Church! Let us Come of Age.

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

June 7, 2020

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Today we celebrate the United Church of Canada 95 years young. That is not at all old, especially when compared to many denominations and faith traditions whose life spans hundreds, thousands of years.

In our short time, though, we have had our conflicts; the United Church has come of age, grappling with many issues. Spiritually speaking, we faced many demons in our life. We struggled with our prejudice around gender issues, still do, but as a National Church we celebrate the gift God has given us in leaders and congregants alike who are from the LGBTQ2+ community. We reflected with shame as we, and ultimately our Moderator Bob Smith, acknowledged to our First Peoples that:

We confused Western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. ¹

We caused great harm, and we as a United Church of Canada work toward reconciliation with First Peoples.

Today, as we ponder mass protests in the United States and Canada, I think that we as a church are reflecting deeply on the challenge issued to us by the Black community, our sisters and brothers. In an article in the June issue of the United Church magazine *Broadview* Adele Halliday ² adds her voice with clarity the voices of Black United Church leaders on social media, suggesting that this is a moment of truth for us, communities of faith like St. Andrew's, and for our entire denomination. It is time to be prophetic, she tells us, a time to acknowledge anti-Black racism in and around us.

Even within myself, as I hear the chant "Black Lives Matter" there is a voice in me that qualifies, it wants to just soften it a bit, "Can't we all agree, instead, that **All** Lives Matter?" Racism is subtle. It is deceptive, and it is fearful, keeping us bunkered in emotional hiding spaces not unlike those disciples locked away when Jesus appeared to them.

Right now, on this our Anniversary of Church Union, our words must be courageous, honest and speak LOVE. Our actions, as Jesus taught, must be for solidarity. Let us as a United Church prophetically demand justice. Perhaps *this* is a Pentecost moment of sorts for us. Anger raging among our American neighbours, and in Canada.

Jesus spoke PEACE to his friends in that Upper Room. He also breathed on them – resuscitating his despairing community that could barely breathe. Let us come of age, St. Andrew's community and United Churches of Sudbury and area: Let us courageously name those racist systems that lay hidden in us. Let us speak and act in solidarity with our Black sisters and brothers, speaking Christ's PEACE. Black Lives Matter.

¹ United Church Apology made to Indigenous Peoples, found at <https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/apologies-response-crest.pdf>

² Adele Halliday, "What I need from white people right now. It's way past time to confront anti-Black racism." *Broadview*. Copyright Observer Publications Inc., 2020 https://broadview.org/what-i-need-from-white-people/?fbclid=IwAR3v8T-JO1VZ_DS996QRpy5ug3EMHBbo_ELoQAO8DSW7TTYZgIMj1-aSjtg