

**66<sup>th</sup> Synod Opening Service Homily**  
**Fr. Michael Lapsley, SSM**  
**Canon for Healing and Reconciliation**  
**All Saints' Cathedral, Edmonton**  
**Feast of St Francis of Assisi, October 4, 2019**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Thank you to my dear friend Bishop Jane for the opportunity to preach to you this evening as we begin our Synod and celebrate the Feast of St Francis of Assisi.

I bring you a loving embrace from the people of God at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town.

It is still in the same week as Orange Shirt Day and little more than a week since the Climate Strike swept the world. The orange dresses decorating our Cathedral are part of our lament for the children who never returned from the residential schools and our commitment to a life of dignity for every child.

I still have vivid memories of the last synod and many beautiful conversations and inspiring stories of what we are all doing to live out ...Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Synod is a wonderful place for reunions and for new meetings...a place to see visions and dream dreams.

It is also a time to account to each other and to God for what we are doing to build God's Kingdom here on earth as we hear in 1 Corinthians 3:9.

We seek to know and do God's will.

As the Letter of John teaches us, God Is Love:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Jesus invited people to follow him. It is clear from the New Testament that the people Jesus invited to follow him were just like you and me ...beautiful and messed up human beings, full of contradictions and at the same time instruments of God's grace.

So the Church of today has many similarities with the early church. but also new challenges.

Indeed we are all God's gift to the Church. But do we believe it in our heart of hearts?

How many of us have unhealed wounds especially from childhood. Often such wounds have affected our sense of self value and our ability to believe in our heart of hearts that we are God's children.

Equally I am sure that for many of us, through God's grace, we have travelled far on journeys towards healing and wholeness.

With God's help, we can become healers of one another so that we experience ourselves in the innermost part of our being as God's children

This week, for the first time, we held a fully residential healing of memories workshop facilitated by Archdeacon Travis Enright, the Rev. Stephanie London, the Rev. Quinn Strikwerda and my colleague Philani Dlamini. We came together as the people of God, a microcosm of the Diocese: clergy and lay, Indigenous and non-Indigenous; gay and straight, women and men. We created a safe place where we gave ourselves permission to be vulnerable, we let our masks slip and told each other who we are. We discovered that as we shared our pain it became transcendent and connected us to one another. We listened to the intergenerational pain of those who went to residential schools. Some lay people had scales falling from their eyes when they discovered that the clergy are just as messed up as they are. We felt less alone and experienced our common humanity. Each of us took a step on the road to healing. For some of us, it was just a gentle step on the road to healing. Some saw more clearly their own unfinished business. For one or two it was a watershed, life changing moment when we began to let go of our victimhood.

Time is passing since I became the Canon for Healing and Reconciliation of this Cathedral Church at the invitation of Bishop Jane. When it comes to Healing and Reconciliation we need to ask "What is God's dream for the Diocese of Edmonton? How can we cooperate with God's Dream? What is God's dream as far as Indigenous Canadians and later arrivals living together in peace with justice?"

Last time I was in Edmonton, Bishop Jane told me that each year she has been writing to Pope Francis encouraging him to come to Canada and on behalf of the Roman Catholic to apologise for all the abuse that happened in the residential schools. I said that if I had an opportunity to meet Pope Francis I would raise the matter with him. In June of this year I was invited by Pope Francis for a private audience. I framed what I shared with His Holiness in terms of how the acknowledgment of pain often provides a key first step in the healing journey of individuals, communities and nations. I spoke to the Holy Father in great appreciation of his own role in compassionately responding to the pain of the human family. As promised, I relayed to Pope Francis what Bishop Jane had repeatedly asked for: that Pope Francis come himself and make public apology for the role of the Catholic Church in the Residential schools. Pope Francis responded by saying that there is a trip to Canada in the pipeline.

I also said that many Indigenous people in the world want to see a complete revocation of the *Doctrine of Discovery* under whose aegis Indigenous nations were conquered, decimated, enslaved and denied the rights belonging to all God's children.

Well that is the Roman Catholic Church... 'what about us?' We have apologised. Now is the time for Restorative Justice and for reparations. At its Synod in May our sister Diocese of New Westminster passed practical motions on how to do reparations and make long-term commitment to healing the wounds of the past that still infect the present... Our acting Dean can tell us more about what they have decided since he was at their Synod.

In relation to human sexuality and same gender loving persons it was extremely painful to witness some in the episcopal leadership across the nation out of step with both the clergy and laity.

I am sure God weeps so long after St. Paul said: In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female... seeing how sexual minorities are often treated in the household of God. God knew what she was doing when we were created all of us with a degree of gender fluidity.

What about the global crisis about climate change? The scientists are telling us that there is just 12 years before there is a tipping point with catastrophic consequences for life on earth. St. Francis of Assisi of Brother Sun, Sister Moon and Sister death back in the 12th Century tried to teach about living in harmony with nature echoed by the encyclical of Pope Francis Laudate Si. Indigenous people; the foundation nations of the human family have never lost sight of living in harmony with Mother Earth.

Two thousand years ago God sent his Son firstly as an infant... we crucified and killed but love triumphed. In our time it is once again our children especially the girl child who will save human life from extinction. Today's prophets are school girls. Just a while ago it was Malala the young woman from Pakistan who won the Nobel Peace Prize after nearly being killed for advocating for the right of the girl child to be educated. As so often throughout history God chooses the most unlikely people as God's messengers. Who could have imagined that Greta a 16-year-old Swedish girl with mental health challenges could become the world's leading advocate for climate justice? At the age of 11 Greta was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and selective autism teaches us that no matter our circumstances we can be messengers of God.

Last week the Anglican Church of Southern Africa declared a Climate Emergency and committed itself to planning strategic interventions. Earlier this year a city of half a million people was 90% destroyed by a hurricane as a consequence of climate change. As we all know here in Alberta the politics and culture of the province have been closely tied to the production of fossil energy since the 1940s. One of our challenges is how to talk about environmental justice and the future of our children and grandchildren... to do so will require guidance and wisdom and courage.

Dear Bishop Jane your visionary leadership has encouraged all of us to share in God's dream of a church in which All God's Children are welcome. Just yesterday as we were training new and old

facilitators we said that we share with you that dream that healing and reconciliation will step-by-step become part of the DNA of the Diocese of Edmonton.

And that every parish and every congregation will become safe places where ancient, old and recent wounds can heal so that we can all become wounded healers.  
So let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Like our Hindu friends I bow before you and acknowledge the divine in you and pray that the light in me sees the light in you. As our first nations teach us we embrace respect humility, courage and wisdom.

God's gift to the Church is YOU. Belong Share Love.