

# *St James United Church*



Message for September 29, 2024  
Orange Shirt Sunday (19th Sunday after Pentecost)

“The Need to be Accountable” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft  
Colossians 3:1-15; Mark 3:31-35; Video: “Justice for Aboriginal Peoples – It’s Time”

I invite you to sit silently to take in what you heard.

## *Silence*

I feel many emotions as I ponder what was shared. I feel respect for the resilience of the first peoples of this land. Despite all that’s happened since contact, they are still here. But what’s happened makes me feel angry, angry at the discrepancies in experiences between them and non-Indigenous peoples despite all the talk made by governments, churches, other groups. In this I feel frustration as I recall the hope I had when the TRC report came out and people became aware of our history, but now it seems like the attitudes of some Canadians is stuck, for some even going backwards.

And so I feel sadness. Sadness for the past, sadness for the present because progress is so slow, sadness for the future even as we mark this day once a year. I feel sad too knowing that as a white person I bear some complicity in all that’s happened, albeit not directly. Because it isn’t direct, it is tempting to say I bear no fault, but I need to admit that policies were put in place by the European founders of this nation, racist policies intended to benefit their white descendants, which includes me, and many of those policies still unduly benefiting me compared to Indigenous peoples, compared to people I know and love. Try as I might, I can’t escape that.

And so in some ways I feel guilty. It’s not a guilt that paralyzes as so often guilt can, that can turn into shame. I think a need to guard against that paralyzing guilt is why some people get stuck, or keep saying, “why don’t they just get over it,” but as they say it there’s lingering guilt just the same. I wonder then if people are trying to avoid the discomfort they feel as they get informed, or even deflect becoming informed. Either way, it leaves us stuck, not just socially, economically, historically, but spiritually too. I’m sure you’ve read these words in Exodus: “the iniquity of the parents will be visited on their children to the fourth generation”. That’s not about punishment but the intergenerational impacts of our actions. We often think of that in terms of trauma but there is guilt too, and intergenerational guilt can sap us spiritually. We can try to deny the heaviness we feel, push it away like when we avoid saying “I’m sorry” for something we did personally to a schoolmate, co-worker, friend. In that case the result is a soured relationship, and you drift apart. As I look back on those experiences, I feel regret, and not just over what happened but at the loss of new memories, the loss of opportunities to grow in and through the relationship. The same is true of intergenerational guilt, the sins of the past souring our present, the awareness of

what my ancestors did wrapped around my hearts, leaving me with the nagging doubt that I am like them, blocking too chances to connect with first peoples and so to grow as a person.

But as we heard in our readings, there is another possibility. Jesus tells us that all who follow God's way are his mother, his brothers and sisters, his siblings. And what is that way? The author of Colossians says it's looking to what is above, to not be tied to earthly things. Earthly in this context isn't material things but rather social norms, historical assumptions, the "powers and principalities" we sometimes read about in the epistles. These are spiritually shaping forces, like a drive for dominance or a push for war that motivates us collectively. What my ancestors once did is part of this. But the author reminds us that we have shed that identity and put on Christ. We are then to embody God's values and let go of distinctions between groups and nurture our connection in Christ across cultures, identities and creeds. And when we make God's values our priority, we keep shedding the assumptions of the past, seek instead to heal our relationships. If that is the case then how can we say, "why don't they get over it?"

We can't. and so we each take accountability for the past, including what the ancestors of many of us here did in our name, conscious too that what was done by them shapes our present. Now there is, of course, no guarantee of forgiveness. That's up to those who've been harmed. But the way to forgiveness is only possible if we face the past, and as we do, we at least create space for a shared future with Indigenous peoples to be born.

Friends, Jesus calls us to follow God's way and so be his mother, his siblings, his family across cultures and beliefs. Our ancestors failed in this, but we can do differently. We do differently by replacing "Why don't they just get over it?" with a heartfelt "I'm sorry." Amen.