

May only the truth be spoken. May only the truth be heard. And may the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen

Please be seated.

The discovery of more than 215 graves at numerous residential schools throughout the width and breadth of our country, identified through the use of ground penetrating radar and less often through spotty historical records, gives light to the tragedies which have occurred through the last one hundred and fifty years of our First Nations peoples' history. June is Indigenous History month in Canada. And we, as God's people must acknowledge the truth, the truth about the pain of past wrongs, the memories held by families left to mourn, the connections lost, and the families torn apart by the taking of their children. These are only a few aspects of the horror and loss which many first nations families are still experiencing. Each of these children were a gift from the Creator. And I can not begin to comprehend the depth of their families' grief for the loss for these little ones. But I can and I do know my own family's loss.

If, you will permit me, I wish to share with you one story of how I understand but a tiny bit of how our sisters and brothers of this land's first peoples are grieving for those lives lost. On my dad's side of the family, my grandfather was born in the year 1900. That would make him to be 124 years of age if he were still alive today. My grandfather had an older sister, named Eulalia , spelt E-U-L-A-L-I-A, and she was born in 1893. Eulalia believed that she was being called by God to a life in the church, as a nun. At age 12, Eulalia entered a convent, leaving her adoring five-year-old brother, my grandfather, behind with her birth family. In 1907, Eulalia was moved to a different convent in a small rural community named Walkerton, in Ontario. from that moment in time, she was never to be heard from again. Throughout his life, my grandfather wondered what had happened to his sister. Was she still alive? Where was she? Why had he never heard from her? Why had he never seen her again?

In 1974, my grandfather asked me to try and find out what happened to Eulalia. At every turn in my search through government records and other sources, I was met with more questions than answers. Every possible lead came to no good end. I tried many avenues of searching which were available back in those days. We did not have things like Ancestry and 23 and Me to rely on, so it was hard to find answers.

My grandfather died in 1977, never having learned what happened to his sister. Through the years, I watched him grieve for his sister, often questioning what more he could have done to find her. My grandfather was a simple man, a man who knew life and work through the use of his hands and not his brain. Yet he grieved his sister's disappearance right up to his own death in 1977.

After his death, I found I could not leave this search alone. In doing more research, I found a record of Eulalia's death in 1914. During my search, we were told by a catholic priest from the church in Walkerton that Eulalia had died under suspicious circumstances connected to the local convent. If only we had known this information before grandpa died, he might have had some sense of closure. But this was not to be. The strange thing about her death is this, there is no record of her burial anywhere in Canada. We still do not know what happened to her. I carry my grandfather's sorrow and his sense of loss, every day, and I still have more questions than I have answers.

I tell you this story not to diminish the sorrow and sense of loss, and abandonment which our sisters and brothers of the First Nations are experiencing today. Rather I share my family's story so that you might understand that in grief, we are all sisters and brothers no matter what culture we come from, because we are all God's children.

Let's take a moment to look at two verses from the gospel passage ... shared with us today. From Mark chapter 3, verse 34 and 35, Jesus says this: 'Who are my mother and my brothers [and here, I choose to add the word "sisters"]?' This passage then goes on like this, 'looking at those

who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers [and sisters]! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’

Two hundred and fifteen children’s graves discovered in one place in Kamloops, and many more across many other sites. These were God’s precious gift to each one of their families, and God most beloved, and had their lives taken from them by a system which failed to recognize the value of every human being, for who they were, instead of who society thought they needed to be. These children were taken, often torn from their parents’ arms, from their communities, from their nations, and for what purpose, to make them something other than who they were?

The 94 articles found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report need to be acknowledged and need to be honoured by all of Canada, not at some point in the future, but right now. We can no longer justify waiting to act because more study is needed. Now is the time to make truth-telling and reconciliation our individual and collective priority. And during Indigenous History month is a good place to start that journey.

The discovery of the graves of these missing children has been tragic. Unfortunately, there have been many more discoveries of undocumented graves since the Kamloops Residential School graves were first discovered, and there will be more in the years ahead. These tragedies should have a profound impact on everyone of us who are resident in this land known to the First Nations as Turtle Island. These are our sisters and brothers, fellow children of our Creator, and we need to acknowledge their journey and be willing to share their pain, their loss, and their grief, and to step up and acknowledge our society’s responsibility for the hurt they have endured.

During the past months, I have been preaching about how much God loves us all. Our Creator has blessed us with family and with relationship with one another. Jesus Christ came into this world to show us how we are to care for each other’s well-being and spirit. And how to minister to

every human being, regardless of their race, creed, gender, or station in life. Again, and again, I have referred to the great commandment which our Lord gave to us, to love the Creator above everything, and to love all our fellow human beings as we ourselves wish to be loved. This is what Jesus taught us. Taught us, so that we and all creation might have life and have it abundantly.

I may never know where my great-aunt Eulalia is buried. But I do know how much love there was between my grandfather and his sister. I also recognize that I continue to grieve because I have never found answers to the questions that remain around her death, and where her mortal body might rest.

In this time of grieving, sorrow, loss, and questioning for our sisters and brothers from every nation of the First peoples of this land, I believe that we need to hear the words found in the Gospel according to Mark, Chapter 3, verses 34 and 35. We need to hear these words as a wake-up call to live as brothers and sisters with all First Nations and all indigenous people, with all peoples, and with all God's created order in the spirit of reconciliation and sharing and truth-telling.

And now, here at All Saints Ganges, we are faced with another call from God to care for our brothers and sisters, those who are less fortunate than many of us. Those who may be unhoused, impoverished, hungry, without the love of family, or just down on their luck. I am speaking here about Gabriel's kitchen. These are also God's children and we are commanded by Jesus to care for their needs. And this is why we are moving toward entering into a new agreement with Gabriel's kitchen. Our wardens and parish council have worked diligently over these past weeks to reach an agreement which we hope will respect the needs and the security of our parishioners, as well as those who attend Gabriel's kitchen. And that this same sense of caring will extend to every activity which takes place within these facilities. These are our sisters, mothers,

and brothers, and God is asking us to care for them as we do our own family.

Today we ask the Creator to continue to bless everyone who comes into this place of worship. May they find this church to be a place of care, a place of sharing, and a place of safety.

Amen