

To Live in Peace with Aboriginal Peoples
Isaiah 65:17-25, Yr. B., September 27, 2015

(This is an imaginative third person sermon)

My name is George, I am an aboriginal living in Canada. My ancient ancestors have lived in this land for thousands of years. We lived respectful for nature. But after the Europeans arrived, all these have changed. They have strong armies and powerful guns. When they saw this huge land, they said this was the land God gave them. They established the "Doctrine of Discovery". The churches in Europe and their political leaders declared this legislation, saying because we weren't Christians, God allowed them to take our land. Of course, we could not resist. This has been some time ago now, we failed numerous battles, we accepted we need to live coexistence with Europeans. They introduced us Jesus, forbade us to dance our traditional dance, beat the drums of our traditional drums, we could only learn to sing Christians hymns. They said pipe organ is the only music instrument of God joy hearing. They really forced their way.

But the most difficult thing was after Canada became a nation, in order to change our culture, language, and the ancient ancestors way of life of, they set up Residential Schools. At that time, most people were Christians. They believed they had a superior faith. They knew they couldn't change us, so they turned their attention to our children. The United Church of Canada established in 1925, they also participated in the Residential Schools work. Together with the Government of Canada, the church thought this was a golden opportunity to preach the gospel to my people. They said the future of indigenous people was to accept Christianity. This was the darkest moment in our history. We do not say believing in Jesus is not good, but why this approach?

The Department of Indian Affairs could come anytime, saw school-age children, and seized them. They didn't need the consent of our parents. They sent our children to distanced places by buses; they said it was legal. They gave them new names, taught them another language and culture. Can you understand the feelings of our aboriginal parents? I have not seen my own children for many years. My mother asked me, "Why can't we live together with our own grandchildren?" I cannot provide an answer.

Can you imagine the feelings of these children and their parents in this forced separation? Can you imagine how aboriginals felt about the God that they preached?

In recent years, government reports have indicated that many children experienced indescribable trauma. Some died of malnutrition, some were abused, some committed suicide. It should not have happened in a Christian nation. Some of us are fortunate to see our children years later. But they are no longer children the way we know them. They grew up. They spoke fluent English, and lived a different way. We didn't know how to talk to them, they knew nothing about aboriginal lifestyle. They didn't know how to live in this beautiful earth. They didn't know how to hunt, to grow vegetables, and to catch fish. They were completely out of touch with the aboriginal way of life.

Aboriginal culture has been seriously damaged. Our language and culture suffered. The most important thing was the spiritual collapse of the whole aboriginal community. Today, the public still thought we

are a bunch of lazy people. They say we drink, waste time and money, and we do not want to integrate into mainstream society. Facing such destruction, only beer could cure our spirit. Seeing our land taken by others, it wasn't easy to be part of the mainstream. The whole Residential schools destroyed our ancestral traditions and culture, the people couldn't communicate. The goal of Residential Schools was to let aboriginal children to know Christ, it could have been a good thing. But when did it in the name of education, it ended up destroying of our normal life, aboriginal culture was bankrupted. We are not stupid people, we aren't people of no faith. When we look at this history, we have mixed feelings about the Christian faith.

But the Residential Schools have changed the United Church of Canada. It changes the way the UCC view other ethnic groups. It also changes the way the UCC approach the work of the gospel. Other churches may not need to do this theological reflection, but the United Church of Canada because of its direct involvement in the Residential Schools, determined to rebuild relationship with the aboriginals. The United Church regrets very much what happened. As an indigenous person, I appreciate very much the action taken by the United Church, for their willingness to correct past mistakes. Today, all ministers who serve The United Church of Canada must take a course on race relations, and to confront the mistakes made concerning the indigenous peoples. For the United Church to be willing to apologize to aboriginal peoples, it is not a simple matter. Christians have always considered themselves the only servants of God, they think they have the best religion, and they behaved arrogantly as shown in history. To admit their fault, it is a gratifying thing. I believe this is the courage true people of God should have.

Some people think that the United Church has forgotten the work of evangelism. No, they have not. Method and message are linked together; they cannot be separated. Evangelism is not simply about persuading people to accept a set of ideas, it is not about raising one's hand to accept Jesus as one's personal Savior. Jesus' love to us is not abstract, nor it is psychological. The way to do evangelism is to share their cries and joy.

The United Church of Canada focuses on building intercultural church. We recognize the work of the gospel is not just asking people to worship with us, but be sensitive to their situation. The gospel is not only about changing the others, but also to change ourselves. Faithful evangelism entails respect for each other's views and beliefs. You will find the United Church does not belittle other religions, such as aboriginal traditional beliefs, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism and other traditional religions. The United Church does not say all religions are the same. Your denomination doesn't say that. But based on their understanding of the gospel, this gospel requires them to pay the highest respect to other peoples and cultures. Today, if people turn to Jesus, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Mission is a two-way street. We listen to together peoples' stories of faith as we share ours to them.

I would like to thank a Korean theologian, his name is Andrew Sung Park. In his book, *The Wounded Heart of God*, he said Christianity emphasizes on the doctrine of justification by faith, but justification by faith has blind spots. One blind spot is that when the church speaks of salvation in this way, a way to proclaim God's love for sinners, it does not deal with the needs of the oppressed people, nor confront directly our relationship with our neighbor. Justification by faith says we cannot help ourselves, we need outside help. We need God's unconditional love. Even though this is a wonderful gift, it can sometimes give us an illusion that there is nothing we can do. The church only needs to preach forgiveness of sins.

From a broader perspective, that is right! All human beings are falling short of the glory of God; all human beings are sinners. But under the umbrella of "all are sinners," from another point of view, these so-called "sinners" have different social situations and have different needs. If we put European Christians and indigenous people together and say they are all "sinners" who need to receive Jesus' forgiveness of sin, then it is to forget these two different people have two different needs: The oppressors and the oppressed have different needs. From this point of view, the oppressors need forgiveness; the oppressed do not need forgiveness, they need justice. These are all sinners, but they need to build reconciliation. This is what United Church of Canada committed to do.

Professor Park said that the truth of justification by faith needs justification by love. For the oppressors who have done harm to others, they need to deal with the wounds they have caused to others. Justification by faith alone cannot be just about our personal position before God. It invites us to face the consequences of sins. Park says justification by faith has misled thousand of Christians into a self-centered journey of faith. He says, "When we have faith, we come to love the afflicted for whom Jesus lived." Park says it best: "The Other side of faith is love. Without love, faith is empty, without faith, love is blind."

We are now in the process of rebuilding their homes. Not all indigenous people are poor, not all indigenous people are unemployed, and only consume alcohol. After the residential school tragedy, it takes time and resources to rebuild our homes. We have aboriginal peoples who are able to integrate into mainstream society, we also have indigenous Christian church, we have pastors. As we rebuild, we re-affirm the traditions our ancient ancestors gave us, writing, and culture. We understand that we live in a different society. I hope you can learn more about our situation and culture by walking with us. We also learn to respect and follow the teachings of the Bible. You are Chinese Christians, I believe you understand what I'm saying is. We are the people who try to protect nature; we are God-fearing people. I hope you will learn more about us through dialogue and not allow discrimination to slight the uniqueness of our culture.

Finally, I want you to know, the history of aboriginal events have profoundly changed the United Church. The Church deeply reflects on past mistakes, hope to establish good relations with aboriginals and other ethnic groups. They want to share the love of Christ through dialogue and service. They pick up the subject of justice. The meaning of evangelism is multiple; it involves service, reconstruction, social justice, emergency aids and religious dialogue, and so on. Many Chinese congregations have narrowly limited their understanding of it only about conversion. Conversion is only a small part of it. The United Church of Canada has a "Mission and Service Fund" (M&S Fund). By supporting this fund, you have touched many people's lives. If you can not personally take the time to do outreach, you can support the church through offering to this fund. This fund has effectively help people in need. This is one of the ways to do evangelism, it is a way to respond to God's love in action.

Let's pray