

Heritage Sunday, October 27, 2013

HWB - *Hymnal Worship Book*, SJ - *Sing the Journey*, SS - *Sing the Story**

June 2013, *Equipping* #137

Introduction:

This worship resource is brought to Mennonite congregations as an aid in preparing for Heritage Sunday.

Each year we are intentional about remembering our Anabaptist past, for our history is foundational to our faith as Mennonites. We look back, seeking to discern spiritual truths from past efforts to live as a faithful people, looking for ways they can guide us in the present and as we look to the future. The Mennonite heritage of persecution, humility, and peaceful responses has shaped us as a people. Our unsuspecting complicity in the suffering of the very people whose lands our ancestors populated as they sought refuge has also made us who we are.

This year our Heritage Sunday falls in the midst of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's five-year mandate. The national theme of the Commission is "It's about Humility." As we hear stories of survivors of residential schools, designed by nineteenth-century government officials as a way of killing the aboriginal in the child, we are becoming aware of the horrors that were taking place virtually in our back yards, even while many of our own ancestors were settling into new homes. We are facing our complicity with the colonial project that brought us to the very land taken from the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of residential school survivors. We are learning that Mennonites, too, taught at and ran residential schools.

In the spirit of being a faithful church, Mennonite Church Canada has prepared resource materials including the informative document, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Mennonite Church Canada www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2057. Some of Mennonite Canada's congregations already have participated in area hearings; for other communities, the hearings will soon be coming.

As we celebrate Heritage Sunday, this year we ask ourselves what does it mean for us as Mennonites to keep the faith? What does being a faithful church mean for us in this current context of a national dialogue between Canada's Aboriginal Peoples and the churches as healing and reconciliation are sought?

Theme: *Keeping the faith*

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22
Psalm 84:1-7
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

GATHERING CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: *How lovely is your dwelling place,
O God, our God.*

People: *With all that we are,
we sing joyful songs to you.*

Leader: *Blessed are those who come to your house
to sing your praises.*

People: *As those that have gone before,
we find our strength in you.*

All: *With each step, those who follow your way grow
in faith, soon to see your face, O God, in all of your glory.*
adapted from Psalm 84: 1-7

Hymns

- SJ 16 *Praise with joy the world's Creator*
- HWB 89 *For the beauty of the earth*

Invocation

God of our fathers, God of our mothers,
As Paul and Timothy,
As Lois and Eunice,
We put our faith in you.
As we worship,
Please open our hearts to your word
And to the inspiration of the faith of those who have gone
before.
Amen

Prayer of Confession: HWB 699

* Song book abbreviations match those used for corresponding worship resources in *Leader Magazine*

Affirmation of Faith:

HWB 711, and HWB 413 *Faith of the martyrs*

Offering Prayer:

HWB 386 *As saints of old*

Children's Time:

Read or retell the story, *Shi-shi-etko*, by Nicola I. Campbell; illust. Kim LaFave; available at Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre, www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/2058.

This story is about a little girl named Shi-Shi-etko, which means 'she loves to play in the water'. Shi-shi-etko's people have always lived in North America, hunting, fishing, and gathering traditional foods and medicines, making their own clothing and building their own houses, making their own rules and taking care of their traditional territories, telling stories, singing, and dancing. Native children were loved so much that the whole community raised them together - parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins, and elders.

But now Shi-shi-etko has to go to Indian Residential School. It is the law. The school is far away from her home, and she will have to travel for a couple of days to get there. Once she arrives at school she won't see her parents for many months or even years, she will lose her traditional name, and she will be forced to speak English - a language she doesn't know.

Sermon Notes:

"It's about Humility." The Scriptures this morning focus our thoughts on the essential place humility has for those concerned with keeping the faith. In our current context of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission seeking to foster healing for Canada's Aboriginal Peoples who suffered in church-run residential schools, we must ask ourselves, what does it mean for us as Mennonites to keep the faith? The prophet Jeremiah and the Gospel writer Luke emphasize humility and teach us spiritual lessons about practicing it. These Scriptures teach us that acknowledging our sins is an essential ingredient in keeping the faith.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks out clearly, insisting that Israel's iniquities witness against them. The Hebrew community has sinned grievously. And yet, there is hope. In the midst of a pit of despair where healing seems impossible, in deep and heart-felt humility, the Hebrew community keeps the faith as they cry out to God, confessing their sin, and the wrongs of their ancestors; in repentance, their faith is restored; again they are able to proclaim their hope in God.

Turning now to the Gospel of Luke, we read of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This story also emphasizes the humility essential in keeping the faith. Here Jesus features a tax collector, a person greatly despised in first-century Judaism for his role in the economic oppression imposed by Rome. A self-righteous Pharisee stands in the temple thanking God that he is not like the thieves, adulterers, and tax collectors in the community. This religious leader is upright and proud; he boasts publicly of fasting twice a week, and of how he faithfully keeps his obligation to tithe. The tax collector stands in stark contrast to the Pharisee. He is standing somewhere in the shadows; he keeps his eyes low; and he implores God to be merciful to him as a sinner. As he often does, Jesus finishes the story with a surprise ending. Turning the religious norm on its head, he places the tax collector as the spiritual model with these words: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." The story points clearly not to the pride of righteousness, but to repentance and humility, as the essential ingredients of keeping the faith.

Finally, as we turn to the second letter to Timothy, we read Paul's familiar expression of faith as he contemplates his death: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." As Mennonites, we are blessed with a strong heritage of humility. Many of our Anabaptist ancestors embraced and owned Paul's anticipation of "the crown of righteousness." Stories abound of women and men, who, through their immersion in Scripture, developed a humility so deep that they surrendered their very lives for their faith.

Coming to the present, we are blessed with a church that strives to be faithful. We have a history of attempting to build healthy relationships with Canada's Aboriginal peoples through such vehicles as Mennonite Church Canada's Indigenous Relations ministry and Mennonite Central Committee's Aboriginal Neighbours program. And yet, as we listen to the stories of residential school survivors and our own ancestors' (perhaps unaware) complicity in the goal of eradicating a culture, our hearts grow heavy. The question remains, how do we practice a spirituality that includes humility? Where do we need to repent? What will it take for us to keep the faith in such a way that we can say with Paul and our Anabaptist ancestors, "We have fought the good fight; we have kept the faith"?

Hymn of Response:

HWB 372, *O healing river*

Prayer of the Church:

HWB 720

Closing Hymn:

HWB 407 *We are people of God's peace*

Sending

Leader: Let us fight the good fight.

People: As we keep the faith,

God will give us strength for the journey.

All: To God be the glory,

forever and ever. Amen

(adapted from II Timothy 4:7, 18)

This worship resource, edited by Elsie Rempel, was prepared for Mennonite Church Canada by Lucille Marr, former pastor of Montreal Mennonite Fellowship, Montreal, Quebec, where she recently participated in the TRC events. Please direct any comments or questions about this resource to erempel@mennonitechurch.ca.