

# Toward Truth and Reconciliation

## Opening the Word

### Special Scripture Selections

#### **Option 1: Ephesians 2:14–22.**

##### **Break down the dividing wall and hostility between us**

Consider a story that talks about a wall, e.g. in Carolyn Pogue's *A New Day* ([www.united-church.ca/sales/ucph/1551344395](http://www.united-church.ca/sales/ucph/1551344395)). Celebrate stories where barriers in building right relationships have been overcome.

#### **Option 2: Matthew 5:21–26.**

##### **First be reconciled, then offer your gift at the altar**

Jamie Scott has prepared a sermon entitled “The Gift in Apology”:

[www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/firstnations/sermon\\_2006](http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/firstnations/sermon_2006)

You might want to explore the role of potlatches and shame feasts in the West Coast Aboriginal traditions.

#### **Option 3: 2 Corinthians 5:17–20.**

##### **We are entrusted with the message of reconciliation**

Reconciliation is far more than making amends; it is being a new creation. It is a process, not a once-and-for-all outcome.

On [www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice](http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice) see Background to explore the texts of the apology, statement of repentance, and principles that would guide us in living out that apology and repentance. Or download *With the Children* and follow Option 2.

## Letters from First Nations

A number of Aboriginal members of the United Church have written letters to the rest of the church: see [www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice](http://www.united-church.ca/aboriginal/schools/resources/trservice)

Please consider reading these instead of the epistle lesson for the day.

## Using the Lectionary Readings

For each Sunday, consider the following:

- Who are the prophets in Aboriginal communities? What is the place of prophecy in Aboriginal spirituality?
- How do we sing a new song (psalm) in the land of the legacy of residential schools?
- What do First Nations peoples have to say to us about faith in the Creator, praying without ceasing, sharing, and giving thanks each day? Read one of the letters from a First Nation person.
- Dramatize the gospel, or pose questions related to the gospel for a dialogue with the congregation or with a First Nations survivor.
- Matthew accentuates seeing the Messiah in each other, and the Messiah as a body of servants.

**October 5, Worldwide Communion Sunday: Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 2–20 (The Ten Commandments); Psalm 19; Matthew 21:33–46**

The Ten Commandments were meant to be guidelines for how to live in Jewish community. First Nations/Indigenous Peoples around the world also had their “legal systems.” This might be a day to consider what it would mean for Canada to join the rest of the world in adopting the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Just as the chief priests and Sadducees realized that Jesus was talking about them as the wicked tenants, could the colonizers of Canada ask themselves how they continue to “kill” and inherit land/resources that are not theirs, and how they have rejected Jesus and his way of non-violence. Also, could you use bannock for Worldwide Communion Sunday?

**October 12, Thanksgiving: Deuteronomy 8:7–18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6–15; Luke 17:11–19**

It seems that many people came to Canada, and then forgot God’s commandments (Deut. 8:11), and began to think that they made themselves wealthy by their own power and strength (vs. 17). Today, all settlers need to be very mindful of the generosity of the First Peoples in this land, and remember to say thank you. How could the First Peoples be healed of diseases (e.g., leprosy is in the same family of bacteria as tuberculosis) that were introduced by settlers?

**October 19, World Food Sunday: Exodus 33:13–23; Psalm 96:1–9, (10-13); Thessalonians 1:1–7**

Moses pleads for God’s presence to go with them. In places of deep pain in Aboriginal communities, the face of God’s astonishing grace has been overwhelming when words of forgiveness have been spoken.

Psalm 137 prompts us to ask “How can we sing a new song in the land in the legacy of residential schools?” Psalm 96 urges us again to sing a new song, and notes that we will be judged with truth. We can sing a new song by speaking the truth and seeking reconciliation—participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in whatever way possible. It is a great use of your taxpayer dollar!

Try serving some Indigenous food on this World Food Sunday after worship. Or a typical lunch or breakfast at a residential school in the 1950s.

**October 26, Sunday closest to the day of the delivery of the Apology to Former Residential School Students of United Church Schools, Their Families and Communities on October 27, 1998: Deuteronomy 34:1–12; Psalm 90:1–6, 13–17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8; Matthew 22:34–40**

With a focus on the death of Moses, one might explore the history of great Aboriginal leaders, particularly residential school survivors (e.g., Flora Merrick, Nora Bernard) who died without witnessing the implementation of the Settlement Agreement and church and government apologies, and the great opening for a new way of being together. You could also draw attention to those who are now leading us into this “new land.”

We can all proclaim with the psalmist that God has been our dwelling place—but how much longer will anger swirl as the experiences of residential schools come to light?

Paul’s description of his missionary actions (vs.7 “gentle like a mother taking care of her children”) are in direct contradiction to Constance Dieter’s book title about residential school students *From Our Mother’s Arms*. Do you know of instances where non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal persons have embraced each other in love and forgiveness?

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Rilke writes: “Love...consists in this, that two solitudes protect, border, and salute each other.” Relations between First Nations peoples and the rest of Canada’s peoples are often described as “two solitudes” with invisible barriers which separate, and reinforce fear and mistrust. If only those solitudes might one day be liberated to be able to describe loving relationships as Jesus commanded, and poet Rilke knows.

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