The Narrow, Rough Path to Reconciliation   
Worship Service for the Indigenous Day of Prayer

June 21 is National Indigenous Peoples Day, and the Indigenous Day of Prayer may be celebrated the Sunday before or after June 21. This worship service was created to honour the meaning of National Indigenous Peoples Day and is intended for use by non-Indigenous communities of faith. The territorial acknowledgment is based on a reparations paradigm.

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Acknowledgement of the Traditional Territory

As we gather here today, we acknowledge we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We are located in different ways in this history and place; we pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place, and remember the pains and repent the sins of colonization.

(Note: Please adapt the above Acknowledgement to fit your specific location. For more information, visit the [Worship Theme: Indigenous](https://www.united-church.ca/worship-theme/indigenous) page and download the resource *Acknowledging the Territory in Worship* found under “Extras.”)

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Opening Prayer

Opening Hymn

“We Are All One People” (MV 141)

“O Great Spirit” (VU 239)

Apology and Response

Reading: 1986 Apology to Indigenous Peoples

Reading: 1988 Response to the 1986 Apology

(Note: The 1986 Apology and 1988 Response are available for download at [Reconciliation and Indigenous Justice: The Apologies](https://www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/apologies).)

**All:** **Let us unite our hearts and minds in the wholeness of life**

**that the Great Spirit has given us.**

Song of Confession

“If I Have Been the Source of Pain” (MV 76)

“Spirit of the Living God” (VU 376)

Passing of the Peace of Christ

Learning Together: Esau and Jacob

(Note: As an introduction to the Esau and Jacob story, have a conversation first with the children and/or others about having siblings, cousins, and friends. What are some of the joys and the hardships of having family or friends of a similar age to you?)

A long time ago, there were two brothers. The firstborn was Esau and the second was Jacob. The oldest son, Esau, was a strong athlete. He was an outdoorsman and good at hunting. At that time, hunting was as popular as ice hockey or baseball is today. Their father, Isaac, liked Esau because he enjoyed watching Esau playing games. On the other hand, the youngest son, Jacob, was smart and clever. He was so good at math that he could win almost every card game. He preferred staying indoors and managing lots of things, especially housekeeping such as cooking and cleaning. Their mother, Rebekah, liked Jacob because she enjoyed being with Jacob and having him assist with her chores.

The thing is, Isaac had the authority to bless the firstborn. Jacob, the youngest, wasn’t happy about it. “Why will Esau, who is not as smart as me, get all the blessings from my father?” Jacob really wanted to get blessings. What’s so important about the blessings? Because a blessing from Isaac is like a blessing from God.

When their father Isaac became old and was nearly blind, he called Esau and wanted to bless him. Before the blessing, Isaac asked Esau, “You go outside and hunt for me and then fix me a hearty meal.” So, Esau went out to hunt. Rebekah overheard the conversation. She called to Jacob, “I’ll prepare a hearty meal. You disguise yourself as Esau and get the blessings from your father.” Because Esau was a hairy man and Jacob had smooth skin, Jacob wore Esau’s clothes and disguised himself with goatskins like Esau. Jacob went to his father pretending that he was Esau. Isaac doubted a little bit at first and asked, “Are you really Esau?” Jacob said, “Yes, father.” Isaac said, “Come close, son.” When Isaac kissed Jacob and smelled the smell of Esau’s clothes, he finally blessed Jacob with all the beautiful words.

After Jacob got the blessing, Esau came home and realized that Jacob had stolen his blessing. Esau was so angry and said, “Jacob deceived me and my father. He stole my blessing. I will kill him.” As I told you, Esau was a strong fighter and he really meant it. Although Jacob got the blessed words from Isaac, he couldn’t gain anything and had to escape from Esau.

Jacob didn’t know that stealing the blessing of his own brother is far from receiving blessings. Jacob had to go through the unspeakable hardships for many years in order to realize this, and to be prepared to get a real blessing. Later, Jacob had to ask forgiveness of Esau. After reconciliation, Jacob became the person who could get God’s blessings properly and share them with others properly. So, please remember that having good relationships with sisters and brothers is critical to getting God’s blessings.

Scripture

Genesis 33:1–17; 34:6–8

(Note: You may also add additional readings of your choice.)

One: May God bless to our understanding this reading from the holy scripture.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

Reflection

Based on Genesis 33:1–17; 34:6–8

Many Christians, especially White settlers and their descendants in North America, have identified themselves with the Israelites and felt justified to take “the promised land.” This interpretation results in “otherizing” Indigenous peoples as the Canaanite. The spiritual descendants of Israel believed that they had legitimate rights to take the Indigenous peoples’ lands, just like the ancient descendants of Israel believed that they had God’s permission to kick out the ancient Indigenous peoples in Canaan and own the promised land.

Could I say that Indigenous people in Canada have been regarded as if they were the Canaanites? Sometimes a comparison is made to say that, unlike the United States, where terrible genocides happened, White settlers in Canada made treaties with Indigenous peoples. I have met some Canadians who believe that the good Canadians did not commit such awful crimes as the Americans did—except for the residential schools. Yet let me ask you one thing about the treaties. Did *Treaty No. 6 between Her Majesty the Queen and the Plain and Wood Cree Indians and other Tribes of Indians* mutually benefit both sides? Hold on a second, wasn’t this “unequal” treaty the solid foundation of the legitimate colonization of Indigenous people in Canada? When justice-minded, non-Indigenous people in Canada say, “We are treaty people,” perhaps this action for justice, made with good intentions, produces an unexpected side effect? In other words, totally unintentionally, this might imply that we participate in justifying and perpetuating the colonizing history, in a sense.

Like the firstborn Esau, Indigenous peoples are the first dwellers in this land. As Esau, the firstborn, sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for bread and lentil stew, so Indigenous people were the first dwellers but traded their lands to the White colonizers with treaties. The deal between Jacob and Esau was not illegal. Treaties were claimed to be legal. At least, White settlers should have observed the treaties and lived in harmony with Indigenous peoples. But they didn’t, and we cannot deny colonization and its ongoing impacts on Canada.

I heard the efforts towards reconciliation that have been made by The United Church of Canada even before I came to Canada from South Korea. I dare to ask: how far has reconciliation proceeded? In 2018, while taking the integration seminar at St. Andrew’s College, I volunteered at a food bank in Saskatoon. I met a 20-year-old Indigenous man who also volunteered. One day, he asked me, “If you could go back to any point in your life, which age would you want to go back to?” I said, “I don’t want to go back, do you?” He answered, “I want to go back when I was 15 years old.” I asked, “Why?” He then said the most devastating words I’d ever heard in Canada: “Because, at that time, I had no criminal record.”

Later, I learned that he is a salient example of the racial injustice in Canada. The 2014 federal incarceration rate in Canada shows us that “Aboriginal youth accounted for 41 per cent of corrections admissions while representing 7 per cent of the youth population. Aboriginal girls accounted for 53 per cent of female youth admitted to corrections. ([Statistics Canada](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14700-eng.htm), 2015b).”[[1]](#footnote-1) Based on these statistics, a “reparations paradigm” seems to be more needed than a “reconciliation’ paradigm.” In order to facilitate reconciliation, we may need to detour to a long, rough way called a reparations paradigm.

Today’s passages illustrate how reconciliation can take place. When Jacob met Esau, he kept calling himself “your servant” and Esau “my Lord.” Jacob *bowed down* to the ground seven times. That’s what a genuine apology looks like. In order to reconcile the broken relationship, the *power relations* must be considered. Jacob’s apology should be authentic because Esau had the life-or-death authority at that moment. What if Esau came alone, without 400 armed men, to meet Jacob and his family? What if Jacob had 4,000 soldiers—what would he do to Esau? Without power balance or power shift, reconciliation is likely to become just an empty word. Whether a strategy or not, Jacob prepared gifts and urged Esau to receive them. The reconciliation cannot be realized by apology without material reparations. On the other hand, just a bunch of money without sincere apologies cannot work, either.

This example of reconciliation also shows us that “separation” is possible and, sometimes, inevitable. Esau offered companionship and protection, but Jacob rejected them. Reconciliation doesn’t have to mean living side by side. It is important that Esau accepted Jacob and shared the land to live separately and together. We need to remember that Indigenous peoples also accepted non-Indigenous people to live separately and together in this land.

As can be seen in today’s passages, reconciliation is by no means easy. Asking for forgiveness from God is free, but asking for forgiveness from people is not free; both are intertwined. Jacob thought he would be killed by Esau and literally almost died while wrestling with God. Jacob had to go through the rough, thorny path financially, spiritually, and physically. But there was no other way. In order to ask forgiveness, Jacob must pay the price—a very expensive price. And only then was he forgiven. Only then could he see the face of God on the face of Esau, who called Jacob “my brother” and embraced him warmly.

Jacob’s family members were not equal, but hierarchal. As a Korean migrant, sometimes I feel like the two maids and their children in front. Although I may feel that I stand on the margin, I am still on Israel’s side; that is, I benefit from this White settler social construction. In terms of privilege, I am also a Zacchaeus.

When I looked for my ministry position in rural Saskatchewan, I heard advice such as: “The rural areas are quite different from St. Andrew’s College;” “You should be careful when talking about racism;” and “You should be cautious when talking about Colten Boushie.” I also know it. Trust me, I can feel it as a newly arrived Asian migrant. Even though I would like to stand up boldly, probably I cannot and may not do it for my own survival. Perhaps I will be one of only five Asian people in the town. So, dear White Christians, especially White ministers, I dare to ask you, beg you to use your White privilege. Use it to make a difference. Please stand up a little more boldly. Please speak up a little more publicly. Make a safer space that I can for the reparation work. As a humble non-White settler, I, too, would like to be part of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Unfortunately, reconciliation is not here; actually, it exists far away over there. However, in order to reach reconciliation, we must start here, not there. No other place. Only here. I would like to wrap up my reflection with questions: I do believe that Jesus Christ is here and now, suffering with the suffered. So, where are you? Are you here? Are you really here?

Prayers of the People and the Lord’s Prayer

Affirmation of Faith

**All:**

**We are, all of us, Treaty People:**

**original inhabitants**

**and those who came later—**

**inheritors of a diverse history,**

**dwellers in a common land,**

**travellers toward a better day.**

**We have known**

**friendship and animosity,**

**cooperation and oppression,**

**blessing and pain.**

**And now we embrace**

**the sacred covenant**

**that heralds a new beginning:**

**that softens the heart**

**and dismantles the prisons of**

**the present and the past.**

**We joyfully claim**

**our rights and responsibilities**

**as Treaty People.**

**Amen.**

*—Treaty People’s Creed (2011), The All My Relations Network of Saskatchewan Conference*

Commissioning and Blessing

Closing Hymn

“Hey Ney Yana” (MV 217)

“To Show by Touch and Word” (VU 427)

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*—This worship service was created by SunDo Hyun and the reflection was written by Hoeun Lee. Originally from South Korea, Hoeun Lee is a Master of Theological Studies student at St. Andrew’s College and the minister of Coteau Hills Pastoral Charge in Saskatchewan. SunDo Hyun is a graduate of St. Andrew’s College who became a United Church minister in 2016 (admitted from the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea). SunDo currently serves in congregational ministry in Saskatchewan.*

1. Őzlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Every One Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 129. You may also wish to refer to more statistics of Indigenous people in Canada: “Aboriginal people make up approximate 3 per cent of the national adult population. Adult Aboriginal people made up 26 per cent of correctional admission, with Aboriginal females accounting for a higher proportion of female admissions (36 per cent) than Aboriginal males for male admissions (25 per cent).” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)