

May the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Our gospel text this week raises an interesting challenge. If you were to write the story of your life as a book, what would be in the first chapter? How would *you* introduce *you* to the reader? Matthew and Luke's gospels begin with the stories surrounding Jesus' conception and birth. But in Mark's Gospel, Jesus arrives with heaven-splitting force, as Mark delves quickly into the action of Jesus' early ministry and teaching. Jesus confronts Satan in the Judean wilderness and overcomes temptation. He announces the reign of God, chooses his first disciples, and—as we heard last week—exorcises demons. Mark's gospel is urgent, abrupt even. There are no poetic flourishes, and the prose are quick and un-ambiguous. Mark's entire mission in the Gospel is to announce the good news of Jesus ministry of teaching and healing; his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus' encounter with Simon's mother-in-law in today's gospel reading reflects this urgency. *Immediately* after arriving at the house of Simon and Andrew, Jesus is told of Simon's mother-in-law, who is ailing with a fever. We might be tempted to imagine this scene, with Jesus quietly tip-toeing up the stairs, offering words of comfort, with the ailing woman slowly rising from her fever.

But no! Jesus **immediately** goes into the room, **grabs** her by the hand, and **lifts** her from the bed. There are no quiet, calming words of healing; just abruptness and urgency as she is hauled up and out of the bed. She then serves everyone assembled in her house. That evening, word spreads throughout the town where they are staying, and all who are sick or possessed with demons are brought out, so that they may be healed by Jesus. After healing many, Jesus rests and then rises early the following morning so that he might go out and pray in solitude. But he is interrupted by Simon and his companions, who remind him that there many who wait for him. Jesus's response is once again one of urgency, for he doesn't return to the town, but instead he and the disciples go on to the next village to proclaim the message.

On Thursday evening this past week, I had the honor of listening to indigenous leader Alan Corbiere read the Covenant Chain Wampum belt at Massey College. Alan told the sacred stories of the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island—the name given to North America before European colonization. Sitting behind a long table, the two belts were stretched out in front of him. Long cords of purple and white beads alternated, forming a design that rippled in the light and depicted the sacred stories being told.

He spoke of the first encounter between indigenous people and explorers, symbolized in the image of a ship and twenty-four people standing on the shore, holding the boat towards the land; a sign of enduring friendship, loyalty, and covenant.

The next morning, I participated in a blanket exercise. Twenty of us stood in sock feet on blankets, stretched out across the floor, with the edges of the blankets just barely overlapping. The indigenous facilitators told a story that was hauntingly different from the hopeful story we heard the night before. This was a story not of enduring friendship and loyalty, but of disloyalty and disrespect; the breaking of treaties and seizure of land. Gradually, throughout the exercise, the blankets were folded smaller and smaller, scattered and separated us still on them.

Some of us were asked to step off of the blankets and sit down, symbolizing the deaths of entire indigenous communities from disease, starvation, military conquest, and conflict with settlers. Others were told to step off the blankets and away from the others, symbolizing loss of culture and isolation from community. The theme for the morning was this: “there must be truth before reconciliation”.

The blanket exercise was a way for us who were gathered to not only wrestle with the facts of history, but more importantly for each of us to be spiritually transformed by the experience of bearing witness to truth: forced relocations, broken treaties, disease, residential schools, cultural assimilation, and death. Many of us who were there that morning questioned whether healing or reconciliation, let alone forgiveness, could ever be possible.

After the exercise, we all sat in a sacred circle that was being led by indigenous Elder Robert Phillips. He had grown up in Toronto and managed to avoid the experience of residential schools, but had still been wounded by an education system that told him he was unequal, inferior, and of no value. He grew up working in jobs beneath his abilities, until eventually—at 51 years old—he returned to university for an undergraduate degree in studio art; and then a master's degree in fine art; and finally a PhD in indigenous studies. Elder Phillips shared his experiences of being wounded; yet never broken. His ultimate call to us was to be agents of respect for one another, so that we might see each other—eye-to-eye—as equals. He spoke of his unfailing hope for the future, and of his confidence that we can mend our ways.

Still, I emerged from the experience unsettled. When we encounter situations of deep systemic and historical injustice, especially injustices committed by institutions of which we are stakeholders, it can be tempting to double-down on our own sense of complicity; to surrender to guilt and hopelessness.

Jesus didn't arrive at Simon's house, at his mother-in-law's bedside, to coax her from illness. Jesus came to her like he did at the beginning of the Mark's gospel: with heaven-splitting force, to heal her; to pull her from lying down in bed, so that she could stand on her own two feet; restored from brokenness to wholeness and wellness. When we come to this church, and gather around that table, we are hearing the promise of healing, so that the wounds of the past can be overcome. Not forgotten, but healed. We are invited to live with the hope that comes from knowing Jesus: who heals the sick and binds up the brokenhearted; who casts out the demons of hopelessness and shame, and calls us to be a people reconciled to God's love.

Yet like Simon's mother-in-law, we are called out of sleep and illness so that we can also serve those around us, and so that we can announce the good news: that truth will be made known and that we will hear the truth when it is spoken; the good news that history is not finished, nor is God's redeeming activity in the world complete. The good news that Christ was raised from the dead still bearing the wounds of his death; and so too, what is broken can be raised to new life, even if the marks remain.

I'd like to close with a quote by Leonard Cohen: "Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." That light came to shine in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. May our thanks now and always be to God. Amen.



Benjamin Gillard is a third-year student at Trinity College working towards a Master's degree in divinity studies. His fieldwork at Church of the Redeemer is focused on ministry for children. Prior to beginning his placement at Redeemer, Benjamin was appointed by the Bishop of Algoma to serve as the summer pastor at Saint Christopher's, McGregor Bay. He is very excited to be returning to Saint Christopher's this summer. Benjamin is a Junior Fellow in residence at Massey College and serves as the elected Don of Hall.