

Parkminster United Church, Doris Jakobsh - Faith Journey:

I've been asked to share my faith journey with you and that for me has long meant reflecting on the question, 'how then shall I live?' based on that provocative verse from Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Many of you will know that I was the daughter of a preacher man, a beloved pastor in a small German evangelical denomination. I was taught early on that my church's teachings were a special 'in' to true Christian living. My life centred on the church community that I grew up in, which meant that I spent, by the time I was a teenager, five evenings a week in various church-related activities. I led music groups and youth groups, taught Sunday School, took part in Bible Study. We also had family prayer time every evening. Dad would read the Bible, we would all kneel and each take our turn praying for our family, for our relatives, for our friends, for lost souls, for the sick and for the needy. I was quite certain from a very young age that I would become a missionary and take the glorious message of Jesus to the far corners of the earth.

What my family life also offered me was the opportunity to have long, passionate arguments with my father, far into the night, especially, about what I increasingly began thinking of as too narrow interpretations of who could actually get to heaven. For the most part, this meant believing exactly as I had been taught and by extension, this also meant that most of the rest would be destined for that most dreaded fiery lake of hell. At some point this just didn't make sense to me. But, my views had to be based in the Bible and so we would pour over select Bible verses and try to make the other see things a little differently. Those long theological discussions always ended in prayer and off we would go to bed.

Fast forward a number of years. I spent some time in my early twenties on a kibbutz in Israel, for the first time in my life coming face to face with living Judaism, and, having to come to terms with the truths of a religion other than Christianity. I simply could not understand how the amazing people I was meeting 'fit' with my understanding of Christ as the only way, the only truth and life. I then had the opportunity to spend some time in Egypt and Turkey especially during the month of Ramadan. I was perplexed by the devotion of

people that I met, who were committed to not eating or drinking for hours and hours for one whole month, especially in the extreme heat of the day. And it made me ponder my own beliefs. And I asked myself, how then shall I live?

I went back to university when I returned from my travels and began to study religion. I also studied feminism, and particularly, feminist theology. And then my world truly turned upside down. I became painfully aware of how notions of a Father God, once so precious to me, had led to exclusionary and harmful, even destructive attitudes toward women, toward the feminine. I began to question those aspects of my Christian faith that led to all aspects of marginalization and rejection. And there were so many – those related to sexual orientation, disability, difference, disenfranchisements in their various hues and shapes. I can honestly say that the awakening to what might best be described as the malevolent aspects of my Christian faith, were some of the most painful years of my life because some of my most central, cherished beliefs were being challenged. And I asked myself, over and over again, ‘how then shall I live’?

Many of you will know that I now spend significant amounts of my life in India. It is not as a missionary, bringing my truth to the multitudes, but as a student. I have come to cherish and be formed by many of the truths of others. Hinduism has taught me that there are countless ways of being in relationship to the Divine. Buddhism teaches me about compassion – compassion toward the other, compassion toward myself. The Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *How to Love*, says that “*understanding* is love’s other name;” in other words, loving others is all about understanding other ways of being, other truths and others’ suffering.

In a similar vein, Mary T. Lathrap, an indigenous poet wrote her 1895 poem, “Judge Softly:”

Remember to walk a mile in another’s moccasins,

And remember the lessons of humanity taught to you by your elders.

We will be known forever by the tracks we leave In other people’s lives, our kindnesses and generosity.

Take the time to walk a mile in another’s moccasins.

And so it is that I come to another stage of my faith journey. Once again, more powerfully than ever, as unsettling as ever before, I am learning and being challenged to acknowledge my complicity in the violence that has come from my privileged, white settler positionality in Canada. I am grappling, in a new way, with the prophetic teachings of Black Lives Matter that insist that I must shift from my comfortable position of being merely open to others and even learning from others, to something far deeper, more jarring: I must reckon and account for and respond to the notion that racism is the foundation of the society in which I live and foundational to my part in that society. I am needing to acknowledge that racism in all its forms, institutional, systemic and personal, has formed me and been endemic to my own personal journey. I am, far too slowly perhaps, realizing that this work will be lifelong: really thinking deeply about what it means to be white, how *my* race shapes other peoples lives. Moreover, neutrality, something that I have held up as a goal and have strived for in my learnings, really doesn't exist in a racist society. As a recent headline insisted, 'Nice White People' Can Still Be Complicit In A Racist Society'.

This also means grappling in a deeply personal way, how the 215 children in unmarked graves in Kamloops, or just days ago, the remains of as many as 751 people in Saskatchewan, challenge my Christian faith and my place in the world. It is far too easy to say that those were Catholic schools and that those are historical wrongs. Until 1969, The United Church of Canada was actively involved with Canada's Residential School system where 150,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and nations and placed in residential schools. We as members of Parkminster United are a part of that legacy. As Stan McKay, the first Indigenous moderator of the United Church of Canada says bluntly: "The United Church apologized in 1986 for its role in colonialism and the words rang out to us announcing a new era of liberation from colonial captivity. Thirty-five years later, there are continuing efforts by churches to find a path to reconciliation. The language that is used is changing but the institution resists transformation. The reality is that Indigenous peoples are colonized. We live with trauma and generations of marginalization have caused us to question our teachings." And I ask, how then shall I live?

And so, my faith journey continues. For it to be a meaningful journey, it propels forward. I am challenged and inspired by many in our own congregation who are

working mightily to teach us and lead us into the way of truth and reconciliation. I am grateful that each Sunday, I am asked to acknowledge with humility and regret, that my history, our histories, and our relationships with our indigenous brothers and sisters have rarely been respectful. And, with humility, I try to commit open-heartedly, on a weekly basis, to a relationship of justice and integrity in the present and in the future.