

## CELEBRATING COVID CANADA DAY—1 July 2020

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A number of years ago, Anglican Rev. Dr. Gary Nicolosi wrote in a Canada Day sermon<sup>i</sup> that British essayist Samuel Johnson's 1875 assertion that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel is profoundly wrong. He argues that what is not good is nationalism, rather than patriotism, and then spelled out the diff between patriotism and nationalism:

- **Nationalism** is expression of national superiority that causes even good people to do evil things in the name of the Motherland or Fatherland. The common adage, "My country right or wrong" is an expression of nationalism. Think of what is happening in the U.S. or what transpired in Nazi Germany.
- **Patriotism** doesn't claim inherent superiority over other countries. It is simply the heartfelt love of country.

In this Canada Day week, patriotism has its place. There are times when it's ok for even reserved Canadians to celebrate that, for all the problems and difficulties in this nation, Canada remains one of the finest places on earth in which to live and raise a family.

Contrasted with the constant rah-rah flag-waving that happens with nationalism, the occasional show of patriotism in Canada is made more special when we show up in red and white and display our flags for a celebration like Canada Day.

Canada's greatness is not based on culture; we are a mosaic of cultures and .ethnicities. Neither is our greatness predicated on power and control by the state, nor —at the other end of the spectrum—on concepts of individual freedom and happiness and opportunity based on materialistic capitalism to get ahead. We have evolved a kind of social consciousness that has provided a social safety net for those Jesus refers to as "the least of these."

Indeed, "the fathers of Confederation who founded Canada built a nation based on the **rule of law and sound government** dating back to the Magna Carta. They formed a constitutional monarchy in which the dignity of the individual and the common good are both valued; in which French and English, Catholic and Protestant, come together rather than oppose one another; in which unity and diversity, compromise and confederation join hands in a middle way of civil discourse, mutual respect and consensus."<sup>ii</sup>

O Canada, how blest we are!

What we didn't get right—failed at miserably, as a matter of fact—is our relationship with Canada's original inhabitants. The atrocities committed against indigenous peoples have only recently been recognized by those of us of settler heritage.

We were so blessed last Sunday to chat in person during our Sunday afternoon worship time on Zoom with Rev. Nancy Best, whom many of us heard preach in the morning since it was (supposedly) my monthly Sunday off. (Other than not writing a sermon, there wasn't much different for me; but that's another subject.)

We heard from Rev. Nancy how hurtful it is when she and her family have suffered from racism, as recently as last week.

And a lot of immigrants were also not treated well over the years.

My introduction to Canada almost thirty years ago was to what I perceived as a culturally diverse, open and welcoming society. Keira was in grade 6 in a Middle School two blocks from our highrise in Mississauga, where 54 languages were spoken. From a vanilla pudding life in NW Ohio, bringing my 11 year old to such multicultural diversity was living my dream of being in Jesus' Kingdom-of-God, now. I thought I had come to heaven.

After I began working with the United Church's General Council Offices, though, I gradually learned about the treatment of Ukrainian and German immigrants to Canada. I learned about our treatment of Canadians of Japanese descent in the 40s, the Chinese head tax, the numbers who died building our country, such as working on the railroad, because they were considered more 'expendable' than white Canadians.

And then I learned about our horrendous history of the Indian Act and residential schools.

Just like my first exposure to apartheid in the 80s, when I had no idea such a situation existed in today's world, I wept when I learned what happened as recently as the Sixties Sweep. Initially, I thought, oh, but I wasn't here. I am not implicated. That, my friends, is liberal white fragility, trying to distance myself from the fact that I am part of a system of racial injustice. And I am still sorting that out; hence the book study we will offer in September, using the book *White Fragility*, by Robin Diangelo. Refer to the announcements in the bulletin for more information.

It's not just in the past, as we heard from Rev. Nancy last Sunday. We are now aware of teen suicides in First Nations communities, of thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women across the country, of communities without clean water (near us, in fact), of high infant mortality, and abject poverty and hopelessness. We learned through the findings of the TRC the many ways we DO bear responsibility today.

A clergy friend from my Interim Ministry training posted on FB a while back, about visiting an incredibly faithful parishioner who is a residential school survivor and is suffering the generational impact of colonialism. She wrote:

“I love interacting with this parishioner [who has] a deep faith in God and ... is a joy to be with. So I am of mixed emotion today—celebrating the most beautiful land I could ever wish to live on and mourning our history that has left the effects of Post Confederation Stress Disorder (PCSD) on peoples and cultures that had so much to offer..., if we had only been willing to dialogue instead of appropriate and dominate. So today I rejoice with those who rejoice and I will not only weep with those who mourn, but will try to join with others to bring about healing. May God keep our land glorious and free for all people.”

And it's not just our relationship with Indigenous peoples that is problematic. In 2011, when I represented the United Church on an international mining justice event in Tanzania, I was thrilled that we were not going through the U.S., so I could travel for the first time solely on my three year old Canadian passport.

But this proudly new Canadian quickly learned Canadians are not welcome in Tanzania, because of the outcomes from Canadian mining in North Mara—leaving people homeless, without livelihood, and sick from contaminated water. I was the only one in our group who had any issues entering the country and was told I would have been warmly welcomed on my U.S. passport. In one gathering, the leaders asked if any Canadians were in the international group and I cringed as I alone raise my hand and was given a passionate plea to carry their message back home.

Two years later, in 2013, I was part of a Breaking the Silence group that visited Guatemala and found circumstances much the same. With Canadian companies doing 70%+ of international mining, we are not looked on kindly in those countries where our companies mine. I am glad to speak with groups about what I learned in Tanzania and Guatemala. I also continue to serve on the coordinating group of the national United for Mining Justice (UfMJ) network.

One of the projects of our Wider Work committee here at EPUC has been to advocate for an Ombudsperson for complainants against Canadian mining companies. The office of CORE, Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise was formed several years ago, but without much authority. Our Wider Work committee continues to work for strengthening that work. Ask Gail Lorimer, Harold Wells, and others on the committee, for information about how YOU can get involved.

More recently, I have been disillusioned to learn about racist organizations in this country. And openly racist politicians. And am friends with people descended from slaves, who raise my radar for such racism.

So I'm torn.

Is Canada the best country in the world to live in? Am I proud of us? Do we celebrate a meagre 153 years of largely white colonialism, and ignore many thousands of years of First Nations history here?

Or do we celebrate the many steps we have taken towards becoming a just society? I know lots of people didn't much like the elder Trudeau...but from what I have learned of him, his vision of a 'just society' resonated then and resonates now. I'll celebrate that, as we keep on moving towards truly living toward it.

Let's hold our leaders accountable—including his son, our current PM—as we work toward true Reconciliation with our First Peoples. After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for the first time, I felt some confidence in this area. Finally, after the TRC findings, the story was being told more widely than ever before. We are hearing less about it these days.

But now, Black Lives Matter protests of the killing of black people both in this country and in the U.S., are continuing to raise our consciousness. As are LGBTQ2+ groups.

The time is now, no more putting it off. Time to work and build together. So, two upcoming opportunities happening at EPUC are the study group in Sept on white fragility and the exploration on becoming an Affirming Community of Faith.

Our past congregational chair, and ongoing busy board member now chairing the Building and Property committee—Jim McMaster—has had a heart conviction: that it's time to do the work to become "Affirming." Jim is passionate about this and has volunteered to coordinate the initiative. Several folks from Wider Work have enthusiastically volunteered to be part of the work. Are you similarly feeling moved by the Spirit? Please talk to Jim, if you are!

As we do these two things, I think it will move us a lot closer to finding our missional centre as a community of faith, to be inviting and inclusive. And that will be crucial in finding our way forward in this transitional time.

Doing the study on our unconscious biases, both in relation to racism and our LGBTQ2+ sisters and brothers, can open our hearts in new ways. As we hear the truth, may our hearts break. Just a little. Or a lot! We can then move forward with the ministry of reconciliation to which we are called as followers of the Way of Jesus. Only through doing some intense work can we find the path to a better future. For this congregation; for this country.

My sermon title called this year's celebration a COVID Canada Day. What's Covid19 got to do with any of this? I think it intersects. Sheltering at home during this pandemic time has been stressful in many ways, yes. But it has also been an opportunity: more time to think, to be aware, to listen, and to reflect. We have been doing that.

As Canadians, and as members of EPUC, there are many values we hold dear, including: generosity, hospitality, inclusiveness, justice-seeking, peacemaking, and sharing our resources. Let us think about and work together until all Canadians—Indigenous and settler; black, white, and many shades between; LGBTQ2+ and cis-heterosexual folks—live equally in the abundant blessings of this wonderful country. May it be so.

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<sup>i</sup> True patriot love: A sermon for Canada Day by By The Rev. Dr. Gary Nicolosi on June, 27 2012; <http://www.anglicanjournal.com/articles/true-patriot-love-a-sermon-for-canada-day-10926>

<sup>ii</sup> **Ibid.**