

Mark 9:38-50

Be at peace with one another

Picture this. Jesus is sitting with his disciples. We know that he is on a journey with them from one place to another and he did not want anyone else to know it. He wanted to take some time away in order to teach them. He had said some pretty difficult things prior to where we pick up the conversation. And as part of the teaching and conversation he has taken a little child and put his arms around the child and he said to the disciples "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcome not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:26-27)

There is no indication, as Jesus continues into what we heard today, that the child is no longer in Jesus' arms. Rather the child becomes central to all that continues to be said. Some of the words you heard are pretty gruesome and rather horrifying to think about. Because of it we often gloss over those words or prefer not to think they came from the mouth of Jesus. But again, the way this was said was not to be taken literally, but rather to be of shock value. Jesus was not advocating for self-mutilation and fear mongering about the fires of hell.

This whole conversation had a lot more to do with those who need protecting and the misuse of power. This, particularly as the disciples had recently had a conversation about who was the greatest among them. Jesus was like, "How do I get this through your heads! This is not about being great, it is about being compassionate, about glorifying God, and protecting those who are powerless in our world." (my paraphrase)

Jesus started with a child. Children need protection. They are powerless, vulnerable, and at the mercy of anyone and everyone.

It is why this story is particularly poignant on this Sunday before the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. I can't help but picture Jesus with his arms around an indigenous child. Can you imagine, with this story in mind, and with Christ's concern for the least of us, how God's heart must have been breaking as children were taken from their homes, brought into residential schools, and made even more vulnerable, their spirits broken? Can you hear their cries for justice, for compassion, for their parents and community?

It is not that it was all ugly for every person, but it was for most. Imagine your child or grandchild being taken from your home and community. But even then, many thought it was something of value, but rather than me telling you the story, I want to share with you the story behind the orange shirt using Phyllis Webstad's own words.

I went to the Mission for one school year in 1973/1974. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson's store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn't understand why they wouldn't give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared.

I was 13 years old and in grade 8 when my son Jeremy was born. Because my grandmother and mother both attended residential school for 10 years each, I never knew what a parent was supposed to be like. With the help of my aunt, Agness Jack, I was able to raise my son and have him know me as his mother.

I went to a treatment centre for healing when I was 27 and have been on this healing journey since then. I finally get it, that the feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in me from my first day at the mission, affected the way I lived my life for many years. Even now, when I know nothing could be further than the truth, I still sometimes feel that I don't matter. Even with all the work I've done!

I am honored to be able to tell my story so that others may benefit and understand, and maybe other survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their stories.¹

Jesus in his teaching was saying to the disciples as he held that child in his hands, get this right. It is not about power it is about compassion.

Where we picked up the conversation today, where the disciples are complaining because there were others casting out demons in Jesus' name, shows that they didn't get what Jesus was trying to tell them...trying to teach them. I guess maybe they thought that only they should have the privilege of casting out demons in Jesus' name, or only they knew the right way to do it. But Jesus stops them and says, just because the others are not like you and not from this group doesn't mean that they do not have something to offer. If they are glorifying God, the Creator, in what they are doing, if they are bringing freedom to the captive, and feeding the poor, giving a cup of water to the thirsty, they are not working against God.

People do not have to be exactly the same to accomplish the will and desire of God, which is to bring peace to others. For Christians we bring the peace of Christ. In a podcast Professor Matt Skinner put it this way, "Jesus' concern was over the

¹ [Phyllis' Story - Orange Shirt Society \(orangeshirtday.org\)](https://www.orangeshirtday.org/). Accessed September 27, 2024.

exploitation and manipulation, the taking advantage of the powerless in a whole host of ways.”² For Jesus it would be better to be without body parts if those parts caused you to harm someone vulnerable than to enter hell with it all in tact.

And for a moment let’s talk about hell, since it comes up a lot in this passage. I can’t say that I have done a study on this, but with all that I have read and pondered, I have come to a place of understanding that hell is life now as we live it or even after death, life or death that is devoid of God. That is hell. In a conversation between professors, Karoline Lewis and Joy Moore, they said it this way, “Hell is a way or state of being that goes against what Jesus has put before us. A place without the present or peace of God. A place without the mercy justice or hospitability of God.”³

As we reflect on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as we wear our orange shirts that are a reminder of the vulnerable being harmed, may we remember what Jesus was actually teaching. Jesus was about ridding the world of abuses. He was serious about the desire to change the world so that all people can be safe but especially those who have no power.

And so he took a little child in his arms. May the children always be the reminder of what Jesus valued and continues to hold as the place for Christians to land, where the most vulnerable among us have our attention, our care, and our compassion and for whom we work for justice and peace. Amen.

² [\(27\) Sermon Brainwave 984: Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost \(Ord. 26B\) - September 29, 2024 - YouTube](#)

³ Ibid.