

## Every Child Matters

*"...And as for your little ones, who you thought would become booty, your children, who today do not yet know right from wrong, they shall enter there; to them I will give it, and they shall take possession of it..." - Deuteronomy 1:39*

Please take the time to go downtown and walk the riverside promenade along Spadina from just South of the Renaissance to the circle of strength sculpture just north of St. Paul's Roman Catholic co-Cathedral. If walking is a problem, drive slowly and carefully, thinking about the orange ribbons and the signs: "Every Child Matters." "215." "Of the many thousands more indigenous children who died in residential schools." Each unique tree, each tree scarred in some way by its life in that place, some so thin and fragile, surviving more because of the overshadowing care of the bigger tree beside it and the invisible support deep in the shared roots, some with limbs cut off, some with bark scraped away to the bone by accident or ill-will, each ribbon-wrapped tree now represents a child, a teenager, a young adult who was buried behind the Kamloops Residential School. Maybe someday the trees will bear their names as well as their spirit.

The Bible verse above was suggested for our devotion today by the Daily Lectionary found in the hymn and service book we use at Zion, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 1136. In the story, the great prophet and leader Moses of the Hebrew people is remembering just before he dies his conversations with God. This memory is part of a conversation Moses had with God while he was trying to lead the people through the dry, dangerous wilderness. The reason it took 40 years was because the people were unfaithful, an entire generation. God decreed that generation would not be allowed to reach the promised land, not even Moses himself. But God did not condemn the children. Nor did God condemn the children whose ribbons are tied to the trees along Spadina. Now after almost 150 years of waiting, it is as though they have been raised from the grave to testify to generations of unfaithfulness. We have laws that protects trees in Saskatoon: we still have laws that do not protect children. An important step towards reconciliation is acknowledging our part in the sin, even a small part. Our Lutheran part may not have been active, but we also confess our sins of omission.

The ribboned trees along Spadina are not evenly spaced, nor are they all in one stand. There are gaps, pauses, as you walk through them. It struck me as I stood in one of those gaps: when the fifth, or the twelfth, or the nineteenth child died, did any staff leave the school? Did anyone petition the director? Did anyone break down in moral distress? The point is not to judge the past but to learn from it. Maybe there is another question we need to ask during this pandemic slowdown: What social sins am I involved in right now? Maybe the ribbons and the signs on the trees along Spadina are trying to tell me. I think I will have to walk through them again. Would you be willing to join me?

*God our creator, every child matters to you; help us so that every child matters to us. Come near to those who cry from the depths and bear a heavy burden of sorrow for sins and crimes brought to the light of truth this week. Assure them that they do not walk this path alone, for you are leading the way to a new future for this nation through the Spirit of reconciliation and respect. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*