

These Deceptive Words

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." --Jeremiah 7:3-4

Evangelical Lutheran Worship Daily Lectionary for the Friday before this Sunday has chosen a challenging Old Testament reading. The background is the prophet's anguish as he weighs what his nation's political destruction means: God has stepped back from God's people because of their refusal to face their sins and crimes. Jeremiah localizes their insistence on their mistaken view of themselves in the Doctrine of the Inviolability of the Temple. The belief that the Temple guaranteed God's favour blinded them to self-criticism and deafened them to prophetic warnings. The foreground is our anguish as we weigh the meaning of our nation's political situation during this Canada Day holiday. Jeremiah's words make clear that we can take no refuge in our ecclesiology. "I am the church—you are the church—we are the church together" right now simply means that we are also guilty of the crimes and sins of Indian Residential Schools. Do not trust these deceptive words: "Lutherans did not operate residential schools." There were Lutheran churches near Cowessess First Nation, near St. Paul Indian Residential High School in Lebret, close to the Indian Residential school at Qu'Appelle. Just as we were hoping for a day of national celebration in a season relatively free of pandemic restrictions, instead we are plunged into a national day of mourning and repentance as we seek to amend our ways and our doings, nationally and personally. Is there gospel here? I stumble over the gospel in these words: "Let me dwell with you in this place." They have the sound of Christ on the cross, arms outstretched in pleading. That God wants to dwell in this land with Aboriginal people, despite the harms inflicted on them by residential school-style Christianity (see Elder Fred Kelly, *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, pp. 11-39) is gospel and grace. That God wants to dwell in this land with church folk like us is gospel and grace. It is also gospel and grace and true reconciliation if we can also say on a national scale to First Nations with some of the humility with which God humbly speaks here, "Let me dwell with you in this place."

Gracious and holy God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our homes, our communities, our country. Through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen