

If Your Brother Has Something Against You...
[Given before joining the Walk for Reconciliation]

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

²¹"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. ²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. ²⁵Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. ²⁶Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

I want us to focus this morning on Matthew 5: 23-24: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go, and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Our First Nations brothers and sisters have something against the church in Canada. As a leader of this part of the church, and on behalf of the larger church in Canada, I want to say how sorry we are for what you have suffered ... and how sorry we are for the role church people played in that suffering. On behalf of the church, I, we, apologize. And we ask you to forgive us.

As far as I know, the Baptist church in Canada was not involved in the Indian Residential School injustice. As far as I know, no one in this room was directly involved in what took place. But relative to what Jesus says to us, it does not matter. For we are His church, and you and your people have something against the church.

Many in this room were young when the pain was inflicted, and some were not even alive. Many in this room did not live in Canada during the Indian Residential School period. Indeed, many in this room actually left other countries where they too suffered injustice, oppression, exploitation. But relative to what Jesus says to us, it does not matter. For we are His church, and you and your people have something against the church.

Most in this room who have lived in Canada during some of the Indian Residential School period were unaware of what was happening. Some might have known some of the story, but did not know what to do about it. But relative to what Jesus says to us, it does not matter. For we are His church, and you and your people have something against the church.

The church has sinned against the children of the First Nations. 150,000 were taken from family and communities and forced to attend Indian Residential Schools. The church has sinned against the mothers and fathers from whom the children were taken against their will. The church sinned against the children in the schools.

And on behalf of the church, I, we, want you to know how sorry we are. We are only beginning to understand. We cannot begin to imagine the grief in the soul of the First Nations. We are only beginning to realize that sorrow runs like deep rivers in your communities. And we are sorry ... so very sorry.

Many of us have misjudged your people. Many of us have made assumptions about why things that happen in your communities happen. In our ignorance, we have said harsh things about your peoples. We are sorry. And we ask you to forgive us.

To forgive is hard work, we know. It is very hard work. As one theologian has put it: "We are never more like God than when we forgive." Which means we will need God to help us do this hard work!

We especially ask you to help your people to not hold what happened against Jesus. Not all that the church does pleases Jesus. Not all who say they act in Jesus' name actually know Him. None of us acts consistently with Him all of the time. Jesus does not approve of the policies that were enacted that inflicted the pain in your souls. Jesus is horrified ... angry ... for what was done to the children. Please help your people see that Jesus did not support what the churches did. Indeed, please help your people see that Jesus loves your people ... and wants the best for them.

If you will receive our apology, if you will receive our offer of friendship, we would like to walk with you in the days and years to come. We want to learn to see the world as you see. To see human beings as you see. To see the Creator as you see, and to see Jesus as you see Him.

So, my brothers, we are so sorry. Please forgive the church. Please forgive us.