

We Are All in This Together

Dr. Allen Jorgenson

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History has a funny way of catching up with us. I was reminded of this a few months ago when I read an article in the *Globe and Mail* (Thursday, August 8, 2013, A1, 14). The article was about a BC artist named Carey Newman. He spoke of his memories of being a child of a white mother, and father of indigenous heritage. His earliest memories of his family were warm and nurturing. But something strange happened when he reached eight years of age. All of a sudden, he and his father lost their ability to communicate; and their relationship grew strained. The next seven years or so were difficult in this regard, and finally Carey's mother insisted that his father find a counselor and work through this issue. It was then that his father came to grips with the fact that he felt alienated from his son at the very same age that he was taken from his own father to go to residential school. The father had done well after residential school, and was doing well as a father, until his son turned the age at which he lost the chance to communicate with his dad. At that time, everything went downhill.

The past sneaks up on us, but not only us but on those who love us, and those whom we love. It wasn't only Carey's father who was injured by this past event that just wouldn't go away; his son suffered, his mother suffered, and we know well that many others suffered in one way or another. For good, or for ill, we are all related, and when one part suffers all parts suffer together (1 Cor. 12:26). "We are all in this together" could very well be our motto for life. And that tie crosses time. It isn't only the case that I live with my decisions, but I also live in some fashion with my parents' decisions, and their parents decisions and so on. We are increasingly aware that this web of life we inhabit doesn't only cross geographic boundaries, but temporal boundaries as well. As William Faulkner was wont to quip: "The past is not dead. In fact it isn't even past." The past shows up in many and various ways for good and for ill.

Canada has engaged in an effort to deal with its past treatment of our indigenous partners. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has supported efforts by the government, the churches and indigenous communities to find pathways for healing. Lutheran church bodies in Canada were not direct participants in the residential school program, and so some of us wonder whether we have a part to play. We do. We do because we are all in this together. If we are a part of the body of Christ, we share in everything. We do not get to pick and choose which bits of Christian history are ours; claiming the reformation and eschewing the religious wars; claiming efforts at emancipation and ignoring colonization. And because the history of our all of our ancestors is our history – just like Carey's father's history became his – so we have responsibility to make right, as best as we are able, what our fore-fathers and mothers made wrong.

It is good to know that Carey's father had opportunity to speak to his experience at a TRC event. It was a painful, but cathartic experience for him and his family. In response to this effort at healing, Carey has initiated an art project which is a collage of artifacts speaking to peoples' experiences of the residential school system. He has endeavored to deal with his past by artistically archiving indigenous peoples' experiences of the residential school system. As a church group that is guilty – not by association but by a mystical communion – what can we do to be about the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18)? To begin with we can do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). We can also keep the stories alive. We can be friends with those who have suffered historically because we have benefited from this sad history. But above all we can join our voices to others who apologize for what has happened. It is given to us, on this side of grave, to make right with words, actions, and solidarity the wrongs that have benefitted us in so many ways. We are all in this together; and in the midst of it all, we encounter the God who is reconciling the world to himself through you, through me, through those who we want to ignore. God grant us the patience, perseverance and power to work for a world made whole in Christ.