

Shock, Grief, and a Longing to See | A Reflection of Lament for this Day of Prayer
[2 Samuel 12](#) & [Mark 10](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church | Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory
A Day of Prayer for Justice and Reconciliation | June 27, 2021 | Cameron Fraser

Today as our service responds to a call to join the United Church of Canada in prayer for Justice and Reconciliation, I am thinking about that term, reconciliation, and I am thinking about in terms of lament.

Reconcile can mean the making of peace between two people, or groups of people.

That's the way we often use it.

But reconcile can also refer to make consistent.

Like reconciling in accounting.

Making sure that records are consistent.

In that sense, both of these stories we have read today are about reconciliation.

Even though both only involve one party of a particular interpersonal relationship.

Both are about one person reconciling with the truth about their situation.

In particular about the truth of the harm their situation has and is causing another.

Both are therefore challenging stories.

One is about someone who themselves has caused harm but has been unable or unwilling to see it.

The other is about someone who lives in a legacy of harm and though they did not cause it, they benefit from the harm that was done in previous generations, and must grapple with what that means for their present and their future.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scripture sees David coming to terms with, the immensity of the injustice that he committed onto the family of Uriah the Hittite.

David saw Bathsheba who was married to Uriah who was away at war.

Fighting for the expansion of David's Kingdom.

David longed for her.

And he was the king so he took her.

Wanting to cover up his act he engaged in trickery and when unsuccessful, he had Uriah killed.

He moved him to the battle line where the fighting was fiercest. And he had the army pull back.

We read Nathan the prophet opening up the reality of what David had done in such a way that David could no longer conduct his deception.

Incidentally, it was most likely only himself he was deceiving.

The story from the Christian Scriptures is a bit more complicated.

Jesus is approached by a rich young man.

'Good Teacher,

He is fluent in the language of respectability

Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

He is also pretty attached to an ethos of inheritance, of being deserving and entitled.

It would be customary, amongst polite company in this social context for the one complimented, the Good Teacher, to respond with a compliment of his own.

Anyone besides me want to own up to now and then sharing a compliment in hopes to receive one back?

But Jesus seems to have missed the memo and instead responds with a list of the commandments:

*You shall not murder;
You shall not commit adultery;
You shall not steal;
You shall not bear false witness;
You shall not defraud;
Honour your father and mother."*

Perhaps you recognize some of this language from what we call the 10 Commandments.

Incidentally these are the 6 of 10 that refer to person to person interactions.

But I wonder, if you're familiar with those 10 if you notice, that Jesus has, and not insignificantly re-worded one of them?

<https://bible.oremus.org/?q|=491801651>

If you happen to be joining us after the original broadcast you're welcome to pause, and go look it up.

Do Not Defraud

That's not in Torah, not in those words, not in that list.

Do not covet your neighbour's property

Has become in Jesus' response to this particular young man...

Do not defraud.

It's an interesting re-framing.

Covet is about desiring something that belongs to someone else, it's very personal it's attitudinal.

Defraud, however, that's language of economic exploitation.

That's not just personal or attitudinal, that's social, and when reproduced becomes systemic.

Remember this, because we'll come back to the young man's possessions, and what they mean in his context in just a few paragraphs.

The young man (and of course he does this) claims that he has kept all of these since his youth.

So, Jesus tells him,

You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

Modern readers might be inclined to think that "many possessions" means the man lives in a big house, with closets of fine clothes, lovely furniture, luxuries and riches, but this is where our 21st Century Western perspective obfuscates the realities of First Century Jewish Palestine under Roman Colonial occupation.

"Many possessions" means land.

Properties.

Farms.

Vineyards.

And when one has many properties there's an added level of meaning because this is a moment in which the landscape (pardon the pun) of landownership is transforming.

According to Ched Myers, in First Century Jewish Palestine, in the time of Roman Colonialism:

Small agricultural landholders groaned under the burden of rent, tithes, taxes, tariffs, and operating expenses; inevitably fall behind, they survived by taking out loans, secured by their land.

When unable to service these loans, the land was lost to lenders, who were in most cases large landowners... It was almost certainly how the man in this story wound up with his many "properties"¹.

When Jesus tells him to go sell what he has and give the money to the poor.

Jesus is not talking about charity.

¹ Ched Myers *Who Will Roll Away The Stone?* (1994) pg. 165.

He is talking about reparations.

Jesus is forcing the young man to recognize that the poor of First Century Jewish Palestine were made to be poor through the very transactions by which the rich became rich.

Jesus is asking that the young man recognize harm, and seek to make things right.

And this will cost him, both his possessions, and his status, his identity as a rich landowner.

*When he heard this,
he was shocked and went away grieving,
for he had many possessions.*

His shock and grief are not those of a trust-fund holding country club member pondering how hard it will be to give away his beloved collection of finely tailored togas.

This is someone who (as his opening interaction with Jesus suggests) has carefully curated his self-understanding as a good person, and is now thrust into moral crisis.

He has imagined a spirituality in which personal piety can co-exist with his wealth, and that image is beginning to unravel like those aforementioned togas.

I'm going to make a guess that given his first question about inheritance, that this man is not the one who made the transactions by which land was acquired and, but is a descendant and inheritor of wealth.

And since he has many possessions (read much land) this would mean that many in the community have been harmed in the dealings with this man's ancestors.

But Jesus' exchange seems to be pretty clear.

He is being held responsible, if not for what happened, absolutely, for what will happen next!

The Right Rev. Bill Phipps, when apologizing to former students of Residential Schools, their families and their communities included the following line.

"We know that many within our church will still not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the [responsibility] for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens."

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously suggested something similar.

Some are guilty.

All are responsible.

David is guilty.

The young man of Mark's Gospel is responsible.

He is also shocked, and he is grieving.

His story is followed shortly after with that of Bartimaeus, who is blind, and when asked what he would like responds, I want to see. Incidentally, Bartimaeus' story makes it clear that physical sight and perception are not one and the same.

Does the young man allow himself to develop the perception that Bartimaeus always held?

Shocked and grieved by what he has heard, will he be willing to see?

Will he be willing to understand the truth about his many possessions?

That he is not simply uniquely blessed, but is the benefactor of what cannot be considered anything else than fraud, predatory lending, exploitation of the situation of others.

I wonder how he holds his grief?

This story, like so many in the Gospel of Mark is open-ended.

We don't actually know what will happen next.

Does he go home, walk through his many vineyards and fields and then sit in his home nursing his feeling of rejection. Is his focus about how Jesus' words made him feel? How these words clashed with the stories of his forebearers and how they'd worked so hard to leave him a better life than they knew?

That's sort of how the story has been traditionally understood.

He disappears.

In that case his shock and grief are really about a wounded ego.

But what if he did something else with this encounter?

What if instead he chooses to see?

He chooses to see how the community he is part of has been devastated by the dynamic of land acquisition in which his ancestors participated?

What if his shock becomes an energizing force?

What if his grief becomes outward focused.

Grieving for the many families who once made home upon the lands that are part of his estate?

Grief for the generations of pain and struggle that followed the tragedy perpetrated by his ancestors who made these deals.

Grief for the spiraling and compounding suffering as the poverty was passed down in ever increasing severity just like his wealth grew with each inheritance.

What if that shock and grief enabled empathy and creativity, deep listening and solidarity?

What if he learned the names of unnamed families who once lived in unmarked plots of land,

...and then what if he gave back the land?

<https://www.facebook.com/ModeratorRichardBott/posts/4438039412906705>

Yesterday, the Right Rev. Richard Bott, current Moderator of the United Church of Canada posted an update to his social media accounts.

He writes of how his mind has been brought to the title of an old hymn these past weeks after announcements from Kamloops and now Cowessess:

Oh come and mourn with me awhile

He writes about his conversations with Rev. Murray Pruden, Executive Minister for Indigenous Justice, about how Murray has invited him to sit with bundle of traditional medicines he as Moderator was gifted by the Indigenous church.

*As the song and the medicines touch me, as their scents fill my head and my soul, I believe they inviting me to stop trying to *do* for a time, something that many of us who are of settler descent find very difficult. I believe they are calling me to remember who this time is really about – the children whose bodies are in the unmarked graves, and the grief of every Indigenous person across this land, because every Indigenous community, every Indigenous person has been changed by the legacy of Canada's residential schools.*

I have been given to understand that the peoples of the Cowessess have a tradition of four days of ceremony for mourning. As I post this, it is the evening of the second day.

Chief Delorme asked [us] to "stand by us as we heal and we get stronger".

There is going to come a time, very soon - a time that will need careful listening, careful action, and careful walking together with all of the Indigenous communities and peoples of this land. I believe this will be a time that will call for challenge and for change, person-to-person, community-to-community, nation-to-nation. We need to be together in a good way in this journey.

I believe that part of being together in a good way, right now, is to stop – to stand by the Cowessess community, and all Indigenous communities, in their mourning and prayer. To quietly mourn and pray, whoever we are, wherever we are.

So, for this moment, that is what I will do. I will continue to pray for the children who were ripped away from their families and communities, and never came home. I will pray for the Survivors. I will pray for the families and communities, the children and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who are grieving today.

So, knowing that hard work is to come.

Knowing that our traditional stories intertwine reconciliation as inseparable from not only truth, but also repentance and reparations.

May we learn to do likewise.

Lament and mourn.

The thing with the Gospel of Mark is that it does not resolve.

It sets up these moments, like the young man and Jesus and the call to make right that what is wrong, to bring healing to the community not through charity but justice, and through undoing that which caused the harm in the first place.

Mark sets these up

And leaves it to the reader, to the listener to fill in the blanks and decide what happens next.