

Rev. Wendy Jean MacLean
Truth & Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Sunday
Wall Street United Church September 28, 2025
Luke 19: 12-26

Holy One, Child of life, Soul of Soul,
With your word you created the world.
But your sacred stories have been abused:
Scripture has been used to exclude and oppress
Nature has been exploited and consumed.
Even so, you never stop longing for us to meet you.
Like a patient teacher, you repeat yourself, generation after generation.
In Jesus you come to meet us, this day, as love in an orange shirt.
Join our prayers to the hopes and longing of survivors
for a new day, of peace and reconciliation.
We draw on the wisdom and words of First Nations:
May our hearts be made one, in Creator Made Free, Jesus,
and may my words be faithful and our understandings be a blessing.
For all our relations we pray. AMEN

One day sometime around 1968, a man from a museum in Winnipeg came to the Anishinabe Bloodvein River First Nation, 235 km north of Winnipeg, looking for cultural artifacts to showcase at the centennial of Manitoba in 1970. He eyed a beautiful cradle board—a tikanagan –and offered Mrs. Fisher thirty dollars for it.

The tikanagan had held many babies over the years. She herself had 23 children. Thirty dollars was not much for such a precious piece of family history, but she must have needed the money. Or maybe she wasn't given much choice and it would have been stolen anyway.

Martina Fisher was the last baby to be carried in that tikanagan her grandfather made. Over the years her sisters wrote to the museum asking to get it back. Finally, last year, a Metis curator decided it was time to repatriate the tikanagan. "It was procured in a dodgy way," she explained. As an act of reconciliation, it was returned to Marlene's family in 2024.

I invite you to listen to the First Nations Translation of the parable we just heard. As you listen, imagine you are in the presence of seven generations of survivors. How do they hear this story?

Luke 19:12-26. (First Nations Translation)

We usually hear this story from the gospel of Matthew. The master calls his servants and entrusts them with a large amount of money called a "talent". In many stewardship campaigns we have been urged to be like the wise stewards

who make the master's talents into even greater wealth. The message, as we have heard it over the years, is that if we use the talents we have, God will multiply them.

If we substitute "land" for talents, we might hear echoes of some of our land stewardship, and the way we use the gifts of the earth.

In the gospel of Luke, the Parable of the Talents, is told by Jesus just before he enters Jerusalem on the donkey, at the beginning of the week that ended with his death on the cross. This story follows the story of Zaccheus, the tiny bureaucrat who hid in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus. Meeting Jesus turned his heart around, and he changed his life completely. He gave half of his possessions to anyone who had need, and to those he had cheated, he returned their losses with four times as much.

Zaccheus is the mirror opposite of the Master in the parable we heard today.

The master rewards the servants who grew his profits He punishes the servant who buried his talent to keep it safe. He gives it to the servant who has done exponentially well with his investments.

Use it or lose it, might be the moral of the story.

Does that sound like Jesus to you? Take from the poor and give more to the rich? When was the Master conflated with God in a way that encouraged exploitation? Maybe the hero of this story is the third servant, who stopped the exploitation and did not cooperate with the ambitious schemes of the Master.

As an act of reconciliation, we can return to scripture, and listen with an awareness that honours and seeks to understand in new ways. This begins by recognizing that our understanding of scripture, and our image of Jesus, is shaped by our culture.

But Jesus will not be held captive to any generation or any culture.

Jesus comes to the heart, from the Spirit, and we do not control his coming.

For generations, Jesus and God have been portrayed as fierce, demanding Masters of the Universe. The church has inspired fear of the Lord as a way of controlling and disciplining followers. Like the master in the parable, Jesus has been portrayed as making ruthless demands for obedience to the social norms of a dominant culture.

But Jesus will not be held captive to any generation or culture. Jesus comes as a shaman, as Wisdom Keeper, as Creator Set Free, and brings healing and hope and the blessing of the medicines of the elders. As an action of reconciliation, we need to learn from Indigenous spiritual teachers.

Jesus calls people into community. Jesus meets the people where they are. Let Jesus come in moccasins as a pipe-carrier. Let Jesus lovingly rock a tikinagon. Let

him speak in a native language. Let his love embrace people of different faiths, or no faith. Let the love do the talking. The Spirit comes in many ways.

Our worldview shapes our values, our attitudes, our beliefs and our stories. We cannot separate ourselves from our cultural ways of seeing. But we can learn to recognize when our cultural worldview is blocking us from understanding our siblings from other cultures, and their worldviews. We can respect –and love–our differences.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), calls the church to collaborate with Indigenous spiritual leaders and Survivors to develop and teach curriculum for all students, clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities, and to respect Indigenous spirituality in its own right. Included in what we MUST learn, is the history and legacy of the residential schools and the church's responsibility to prevent further spiritual violence. (TRC Call 59-61)

The TRC calls for

Community-controlled healing and reconciliation projects.

Community controlled-culture and language revitalization projects.

Community-controlled education and relationship-building projects.

Learning, healing and relationships take place in community. People learn together.

How does our parable look if we interpret it from a different worldview? As Western Christians, we tend to think linearly. The doctrine of progress at the heart of the Western worldview is based on a continual movement towards greater and greater growth and improvement. We identify with the master growing his fortune. Growth is a sign of progress and blessing. Prosperity is a gift of God.

From this worldview, when Jesus says, "*I am the Alpha and Omega,*" we see a line from A to Z. A life of faith is a step-by-step progression that extends from birth to death, from earth to heaven. In faith, each step brings us closer to heaven. Following the way of Jesus means lifting up the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick. We look forward to the Kingdom of God as the fulfillment of the blessings of God for all people.

An Indigenous worldview, which is common to most traditional cultures, takes a different approach. Life proceeds in a circle, not a line. "There is no finish line, no steps and stages," explains Cindy S. Lee, in her book, *Our Un-forming, De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation*.

In this worldview, we return again and again to the source, to be formed and un-formed, to be reformed and transformed. In a cyclical worldview, we meet the

same issues again and again, each time with the possibility of changing us. We see the repetition in cycles of poverty and the inter-generational trauma.

As survivors were able to tell their stories, the circles were transformed and expanded to include the truth, and the tools for healing and flourishing.

In a cyclical worldview, we return again and again to the source of life. Each time we are a bit different. Alpha meets Omega. We turn and return, with Christ, the source of love. Each time we return to the Great Spirit, we are reminded of our sacred selves, and our connection with all Creation. A life of faith is “the good life”, the Way. It is a circle, not a line.

This worldview reflects the natural world and the cycle of seasons. This is the world seen from the tikanagon. Elder Marlene Pierre, from Fort William, describes how a child is carried: “*We take them out when we’re berry picking. We lean the tikanagon up against a tree, so the baby can look out and see the world around them. So they are getting in tune with nature from the very beginning.*” Not looking up, but looking out—at the world.

Many years ago I visited the Sandy Lake Oji-Cree reserve in northern Ontario. At the Northern Store, a little girl standing in line ahead of me had her sister in a tikanagon. I asked her if I could hold it. I will never forget the way that infant was so firmly supported in that cradle board. It was a blessing to me to hold her.

Later that weekend, the minister invited us to be present at the deathbed of a beloved elder. He had been flown home for his last days, after living in Red Lake, in a long term care home. His friends and family were gathered around him, singing and praying. I recognized some of the old hymns, sung in English and Oji-Cree. In a ritual I did not understand, people put five dollar bills on his body. He was being lovingly escorted from life into the next world.

As I prayed and sang with his people, I felt his life slowly ebbing from his body. It was as if his spirit was being lovingly unlaced from this human life, like his physical body was being lifted from the tikanogan that held his soul from birth.

Just before his death, Jesus told his followers the parable we heard today. He knew what was ahead, and he knew that his followers expected the kingdom would be fulfilled when he rode into Jerusalem. He was the Messiah.

Like one blanket, or one talent: We have his story, to cherish and to hold, to hold and to share. It is precious, and must not be used to oppress or exploit others. It does not belong to us, we belong to it.

The Survivors are telling their stories. We must hold them reverently and with deep respect. In our orange shirts, we join our prayers to the longing for healing for survivors. May our actions be true, in the spirit of Creator Sets Free. AMEN

Resources:

Cindy S. Lee. **Our Un-forming: De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation.** (Fortress Press) 2022

David A. Robertson. **52 Ways to Reconcile: How to Walk With Indigenous Peoples on the Path to Healing.** (McLelland and Stewart)2025.

Ched Myers. **The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics.** (Bartimeus Cooperative Ministries) 2001

<https://anishinabeknews.ca/exhibition-aims-to-revive-the-creation-of-tikinagans/>

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