

Haunted.... Healing....

Rev. Sarah Campbell

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Luke 9:1-6

At its best, Germany has and continues to reckon with its demonic past.

Germany is haunted by its history of its holocaust, the extermination of Jews, gay men, disabled people, and Roma. It should be, haunted; instead of being in denial and manipulating the story line. Much of Germany has done the painful work of examining and probing the storylines of their country, culture, and most painful of all, their families.

Can you imagine those family conversations? Maybe with a father on his death bed or a great aunt while hiking? "Did you have Jewish friends who were taken away? What did your parents say? Did you ever talk about it in church? Did your uncle talk about what he did during the war?" And the silences are telling. Silence may reflect trauma. These are *my* people?, you wonder... And yet you still love them.

And you promise to do everything in your power to exorcise this demonic Nazi poison from your land and culture; and to make certain that everything, every policy, every new initiative passes through this righteous filter. Everything. And you promise to tell the story of what happened truthfully to future generations.

Yes, there is a rightwing remnant, but mostly Germany has done and continues to do a deep and wide and public reckoning with its past.

Did it begin when they looked, not averting their eyes, but looked straight on at the extremely graphic photographs taken at the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps? The truth before their very eyes...oh...so that's why our uncle was silent....

Darnella Frazier courageously captured a video of the lynching of George Floyd. Extremely graphic, it is. The truth before our very eyes. And this event ignited a reckoning that won't stop in our world, our nation, our state, our selves. The video managed to penetrate the unconscious haunting of white people. Yes, the backlash is like a tidal wave, civil tribalism like we've not experienced in our lifetime. But the reckoning will not stop. This land of 10,000 lakes, and of great colleges and universities; is also the land of racial covenants and of the nation's worst education achievement gaps between black and white students; is also the land of attempted, but not successful, cultural genocide of indigenous peoples from the

slaughter of the buffalo, settler infringement on land, and aggressive assimilation policies like boarding schools.....

The haunting of those of us who are white is getting more pronounced, harder to ignore..... As well it should.

Even if we've done it before, we're circling around again, and examining our storylines anew. Examining the storylines that shape and sometimes misshape us. Wanting to know more. Willing to hold the complexity-- no erasure, no oversimplification... the storylines of our state.... You know those historic markers dotting the land, when you take a road trip? They are not innocuous. Far from it. They shape and sometimes misshape our collective storyline. It's like finding old letters of our ancestors, the words and the absence of words... What really happened on this land? How were our ancestors involved?

The late great writer Joan Didion wrote a lot about the power of story, in our country, to create identity. But it wasn't just intellectual. She was a proud 5th generation Californian. She believed that she was who she was—with her theatrical and extreme temperament— because of her adventuresome California settler ancestors. This courage was in her blood. But as she got older, she became more aware of the contradictions in the California story line. It wasn't just about entrepreneurial individualism. There were also federal grants and subsidies...The storyline got more complex, as did her self-understanding....

I can relate! Can you? My storyline is getting more complex and more haunting even. I wish I knew more about my ancestors. Part of me does. The faithful, truth-seeking God centered part of me does. Oh these storylines, both precious and problematic they It's part of the Campbell lore that my father, though plenty spacey and slightly neurotic, was also a fearless adventurer from the time he was a boy. He went places, new places, by himself. As the storyline goes, he inherited this from his father-- whom we never met, he died when my dad was 10, which thickens the storyline even more with trauma. But this grandfather Campbell spent two years in the Philippines at the turn of the last century as an educator. I've always been proud of and curious about this adventuresome strand in my family storyline but now I'm learning more about how this was the very same time of the devastating US colonization of the Philippines... and I wonder: how was my grandfather a part of this? How did he think about it? And what did my dad, a pretty enlightened Nation magazine reading progressive, think about it?

Our storylines get thicker, sometimes more haunting, as we circle around again and again, or maybe it's more like a spiral into deeper truth...

This is a hard, healing, holy period of reckoning in our nation and state's history. And we who are white need to be asking a lot more questions of our relatives before they die. Do any of you have ancestors who benefited from any Homestead Acts?... Isn't it time to ask more questions of the elders, if you've not already? Both about why the ancestors left the homeland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and about how they settled in this land? "Was their immigration voluntary, involuntary, or forced? What were the larger push (like war, famine, unemployment) and pull factors (Family reunification, economic opportunity, religious freedom) that impelled migration? Who were the indigenous peoples of the area where your forebears settled? And what was happening to them as your people moved in? Do you know any stories of settler-Indigenous encounters there? What is missing from your family stories?" Listen for the potent silences. Denial is the primary way settler culture handles the ghosts. (Enns)

Our family storylines are complex, filled with the heroic and courageous and the traumatic and shameful. To heal from the haunting, we need to tell the truth, all of it, not just some of it. Let us burn the myths of innocence on the altar of truth. And when we collectively grapple with our entangled history, and wrestle mightily with the hauntings that plague our state's unconscious, and together create a movement of de-colonization, everything will begin to change. Like in Germany. Lest our grandchildren say to us in the future with heavy, heavy hearts and a kind of disbelief "why weren't we told?"

We're talking this morning about our storylines, and how they shape us and misshape us and about circling around again and again in our lifetime until we get the story right....

As religious people we are well practiced in the art of story—story telling, story listening, story questioning.... Over a lifetime we will circle back to the same bible story many times and our understanding of the same story might even change dramatically. And we know the importance of these stories to us; that they are most relevant to our lives. Like our family stories...

There are some stories in the Bible which I still don't get. Or maybe I'm not ready to get them yet. Is the same is true for you?

Like today's story. I never really got it, until recently that is, thanks to a remarkable book, entitled Healing Haunted Histories. , which I will be quoting from. It's by Canadian Mennonites, who come from a long history of oppression in Europe, who had to emigrate for survival; but then, as settlers in Canada, *they* were the colonizers, the oppressors of the indigenous people of this land.

But first come with me now to the Middle East over 2,000 years ago to the birth of Christianity.

“Since its inception, Christianity has been mission driven. The first disciples took up Jesus’ annunciation of God’s kingdom as an alternative to the Roman empire, a mission of grace, social equality, mutual aide, and healing. This message of liberation and wholeness spread rapidly among those who suffered under Rome’s slave based extractive economy. It was a subversive mission with real costs... crucifixion or imprisonment or exile. However, what began as a grassroots mission from below for liberation from empire began to change, especially after the Emperor Constatine converted to Christianity. It increasingly became a religion of conquest from above.” (Enns) A millennial later, the Doctrine of Discovery was adopted in Europe and colonialism spread like wildfire across the so-called new world...

But according to scripture, Jesus’ message was very different, not a colonizing message at all. Quite the contrary.

Today’s scripture is about *how* to share the good news. First, a reminder of what this good news is. It isn’t about claiming Jesus as your lord and savior so that you can get into heaven when you die. No! The good news is about,

- Proclaiming an alternative social and political order, the kingdom of God
- And healing people who are oppressed and diseased.

Now, how are the disciples to share this good news with others? Here’s how.

“Take nothing for your journey, no staff, no bag, no money, not even an extra tunic. This is not just about traveling light, it’s also about vulnerability. Missionaries are not in control. The travelers are dependent on the hosts.

One tunic, what’s that about? Over time the missionaries will need to adopt local style and not impose their culture. (Think of the boarding schools... they cut the children’s hair and had them wear western clothes and speak English...)

“Stay in that place and leave from there” Jesus instructs. Don’t move around looking for a better deal, don’t demand special treatment. Eat locally and be grateful.

And then leave....The missionary remains a guest, whose task it is to understand the new place and people and then leave. Should missionaries be invited to stay permanently it is on the terms of the host community.

And, realistically, there will be places where they are not welcomed. If you are not welcome, leave. Don’t retaliate. Don’t force yourself on the locals. Don’t take over their country. Move on. Shake off your feet. Leave.

European missionaries on Turtle Island, North America, almost always encountered generous hospitality from Indigenous peoples. Welcoming strangers was and is common in traditional cultures everywhere. But indigenous hospitality was very soon abused by the guests who pursued objectives more suited to conquest than community. These missionaries were

sometimes double agents for imperial conquest; often pawns of those who wanted to extract wealth or to get more territory for their nation; sometimes they were helpful buffers, translators, and even advocates for the indigenous people.” (Enns) But as a whole the Christian missionaries of the 1800s are part and parcel of the near genocidal colonization of Minnesota and beyond: Is it too strong to say?: The cross and the sword were one.

Imagine, just imagine, how different the story of this land might be if our missionary ancestors had followed Jesus’ missionary instructions, according to Luke. If they had heeded his warning to always stay the guest.

We’re talking about story lines this morning and how they change and must change. Let us hold each other tight as we continue to pull back the veil, to find the missing pieces of our storyline. We are all haunted by these untold stories.

“This history is not your fault, but it is absolutely your responsibility”: Niki Sanchez says to us who are white.

Let us tell a new story. Let us, deepen our relationships with those who have been traumatized by this shared, entangled history and collectively find practices of restoration and solidarity—all of us, indigenous, black, brown and white. (Like the remarkable work of the Minnesota Council of Churches.)

We will seek and find our story. Every round, every generation, on and on the circle turning towards God’s dream of justice.

Let us pray... God have mercy. Kyrie Eleison. God have mercy and for the sins of the past... Give us hope for the future. Amen.

Sources

Enns, Elaine, and Ched Meyers, Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization, Cascade Books, 2021.

Kakutani, Michiko, “The Prophetic Eye of Joan Didion”, New York Times, Dec. 30, 2021.

