

Contemporary Canaan

Deuteronomy 7:1-6, 12-26

Hello, good morning. My name is Peter – some of you may know me as Pan. Friends call me Pan, and my pronouns are they/them/theirs. I am a Scottish-Canadian, Edmonton-born...born into the United Church of Canada. And I just finished four years of seminary in the States. So, I'm back. Of course, I wouldn't be up here today if I wasn't a keen advocate for justice.

That scripture. Let's shake it off a little bit. I am going to bring it back into your minds. Thank you for moving us away from it, but let's come back to these hard things. It's a cruel, difficult-to-digest passage. One that we don't hear very often. It's not actually in the lectionary schedule; it's probably avoided most of the time. But I chose it intentionally, because we need to practice hearing hard things. There are a lot of hard truths in our history, and we need to actually hear them in order to work through them. Unfortunately, confrontation and conflict are not comfortable. Especially when we have harm and guilt associated with them. So truths like this are hard to process. This scripture – the Canaan land being given over to another people, because God says so – this is not just a standalone scripture. This is an echo of Exodus, this is an affirmation of Genesis, it is also in Leviticus...all of these early scriptures have a lot of these "chosen people". Okay, so this "chosen people" idea sets them apart. We can call that *othering*. So we now have an idea of, "*these people are different from us*", which then leads to, we know, lots of discrimination.

There are two more passages, or concepts that come from the Bible that we know as Christians. Romans 13 is important because it gives authority to rule to a Christian people. Matthew 28 is called "The Great Commission", and that is when Jesus sends out his disciples into the world: "Spread the Good News that I am sharing with you." Scripture on its own does not have to be terrible – although it does sound terrible sometimes. It's important to hear, and we can always learn from these things, whether or not we repeat them. Those three ideas or concepts

or scriptures enabled colonization. In the 15th century, we have the various Popes making statements to their monarchs, saying, “Christianity is the best, and I think that if people around the world are not Christian, you have every right to go in, take their land, and do what you want with them.” Because we’ve got this othering: they are not Christian, they are not worthy. If you’ve heard the “Doctrine of Discovery” term. All this kind of idealization and placing these scriptures in the fore of why Christians are the best leads into this Doctrine of Discovery. Which justifies and legalizes colonization.

This taking of someone else’s land can happen in three ways: conquest. Cession or exchange; so like, a treaty. Or simply occupation. You come in the land, you sit there, it’s yours. This sounds very similar to what we just heard in Deuteronomy. This repetition of history leads into our British Canadian treatment of the Canaanites – I mean the Indigenous people on Turtle Island. Turtle Island, contemporary Canaan...there we go.

We have other truths. The story that I read earlier is a gentle introduction to some really hard truths that we have been hearing in the last couple decades coming from survivors of residential schools. These are horrible experiences that aren’t showing up in this children’s book. 1831-1996 was how long we ran schools in “Canada”. These were church-led. So I think sometimes we think abstractly about the Indigenous experience and forget that there is a really key Christian part of it. This is a federally-funded, church-led cultural genocide and attempted forced assimilation. These are a lot of hard truths that build into long intergenerational trauma – for us and for them, for everyone has experienced this trauma. And it lasts as harm and ongoing behaviours.

(Deep breath) Okay, so truth: we need it. We can’t only have truth; we can’t just sit here and despair, because if we just heard all of these truths over and over again, we would be piled up and we would have nothing. We would just be stagnated, feeling this harm, and not knowing what to do. We need to face the truth in order to break the cycles; we need to learn from these stories, not necessarily repeat them. We also need to balance these truths with reconciliation. We need to do action. We now have – this is our fourth year officially of The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation; it only started in 2021 – as part of the *94 Calls to Action* from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So we are starting. We are starting this reconciliation. This is our story as a people of faith. Therefore, our truths are our responsibility. We are called, as Karen said earlier, to reconcile and make new. What will we make new?

Thankfully, we can also go find good role models in our scripture. I'm thinking of Jesus (yay). Who was Jesus? Jesus was a Jewish teacher. And so, he also had these scriptures to work with. He also had these scriptures that we're talking about to wrestle with. I'm thinking of the time when Jesus met a Canaanite woman and said, "No, I'm not here for you. I'm not going to heal your daughter, because I am only here for these people." And she said, "Whoa, um, you don't have to do that. You can heal my daughter. I'm going to keep pushing you, I'm going to call you out and invite you to change. I'm challenging you." And so he had the opportunity to reconcile with her, and to reconcile with his own history, his own people's beliefs. And therefore, he was empowered to say, "Oh, actually, you know what, you're right. I'm going to heal your daughter. Thank you for correcting me." That is a great model for us. Knowing that Jesus is not perfect. That we are not perfect; we are not expected to be perfect, but we are expected to learn.

We can also look at some contemporary models of reconciliation. Here are some things to put in your back pocket when you are struggling with these truths. What can I do with Number one: we learned it as kids, but we need to practice it still all throughout our life. Let's make apologies. Simply apologize. Recognize that you've done something wrong. Public, honest, following through. The United Church has modelled this for us in 1988, while some residential schools were still operating, we made our first public apology to the treatment of Indigenous peoples. We had to go back and say, "We'll apologize again because we are taking responsibility for our role in residential schools specifically." We ran 15 over the course of nearly 100 years. 15 different schools run by the United Church. So, apologizing.

Number two: we can see other people not as others, but as equals. As having rights just like ours. *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a cute little booklet that is written out, "Here's how you treat people nicely and honour their histories." If you haven't seen it, look for it – they're all over the place. That happened in 2007. I'm sorry to say, Canada did not like it right off the hop. Didn't sign on to it, but they changed their mind. Again, showing that we can make mistakes and learn from them.

The third thing we can do is just in our interpersonal everyday: recognize that what someone is telling you is their truth. A lot of times we hear this, "Oh, I don't believe you." Believe them! They have stories and they are true to them.

Number four: just do your work. You don't need to burden everybody, you don't need to ask every single person for their story. We have Google. We have

podcasts. We have films. We have books – books, books, books, books, books. We have workshops and all sorts of things that we can learn from. There are 94 calls to action; five of them are directed at the church. I encourage you to go read them.

Lastly, of course, we can learn from our past. We can make mistakes without fear. Knowing that, like Jesus, we can make mistakes and we have the opportunities to learn from them. So learning from our past and trying things, even if we're worried that we might mess up.

It's a lot. What I want you to take away from this is that scripture is story. Our history is story. And a narrative – no matter real or fiction – carries a truth to the listeners. What we as listeners *do* with that truth determines whether we perpetuate more harm and imbalance, more pain and trauma. Or, if we are bringing peace, justice, and reconciliation into the world as we believe the Spirit is calling us to do.

One last thing: you see me do this (shake it out) and take pauses and breaths. I encourage you, as you hear difficult things in your life, to center yourself and let those things come into your body and recognize that they are in your body. Center yourself, shake yourself out, look up, look down, around. Place yourself where you are. And another thing that we do really well in the United Church is singing. Putting yourselves into your body. Humming, making noise, collectively singing is a great way to help break out that negative energy from ourselves. So our next hymn will help us do that. Voices United 371: *Open My Eyes*. Thank you for listening.