

# Canada Day 2021

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.  
(Romans 12:15 ESV)

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup>I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.  
(1 Corinthians 9:22-23 ESV)

## Weep With Those Who Weep

July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Romans 12:15

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 12.

Every Wednesday I meet with a group of pastors to review and discuss our sermons and to study the craft of preaching. If you ever hear me refer to “The Preaching Workshop” that’s what I’m talking about. In the preaching workshop we’ve often discussed the question: “When is it appropriate to respond in a sermon to current events?” Of course, you don’t want to be responding to every current event or else you’d wind up with a preaching calendar that looks like it’s been written by the mainstream media.

But I think we can all agree that there are some events that demand our attention. On the Sunday following September 11<sup>th</sup>, you would be hard-pressed to find a church in America that wasn’t opening the Bible to find comfort and wisdom for the tragedy that had transpired. Likewise, a little over a year ago, when the entire world was shut down with a virus, most churches saw fit to spend a few sermons unpacking the new reality that they found themselves in.

What we’re going to be discussing this morning could be understood as a case study of what Matt unpacked for us last week. Last week we were reminded that sin is serious. We learned that sin brings death, and that it spreads and affects the whole community, and that some sin leaves long-lasting consequences. Today we are going to stop to consider a sin that forever changed our country and that has trickled down to damage children and grandchildren and great grandchildren.

With the recent discovery of 751 unmarked graves containing the remains of Cowessess children combined with the 215 unmarked graves in Kamloops, and all the unmarked graves that will likely be uncovered in the weeks and months to come, this morning I think it's past time for us to pause.

I want to say before we go any further that my intention is not to detail and analyse the history of residential schools. That history is being unpacked all around us by people who are far better equipped for the task. I have no desire to foray into politics or to pretend that I am sufficiently equipped to navigate all the nuances of this terrible tragedy.

But what I feel called to do this morning as the pastor of this little congregation in Orillia is to spend some time thinking and praying with you about how we can best resemble Christ in this cultural moment. To that end, we are going to turn our attention to Romans 12.

If you're familiar at all with the Book of Romans, then you know that it is the most theologically robust letter that the Apostle Paul ever wrote. Romans is a Holy Spirit inspired FIRE HOSE of theology! And as we read Romans and as we are blasted by that gospel firehose, we are reminded that right theology can never be separated from right living. They go hand in hand.

What you believe MUST change you! At the beginning of chapter 12 – after Paul has finished explaining the glorious news of what God has done for us in Christ, he turns his attention to how now we ought to live as forgiven and transformed people. He says:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 ESV)

“Therefore! In light of this AMAZING GOSPEL – now that Jesus has born our sins once and for all and made a way for us to be with our Heavenly Father – brothers and sisters, bring your LIFE to the tabernacle! (That language pops a little more when you're in the middle of a series in Leviticus, doesn't it?) Leave the bull at home and lay YOURSELF down on that altar! And every day, by the grace of God, resolve to be a person that is TRANSFORMED by Jesus Christ! You have a new mind so you should THINK differently than you used to, and that new thinking should lead to renewed living!”

He goes on to unpack how that different living ought to look and I want to zoom in on one command that feels particularly relevant at a time like this. We find it in verse 15. Look there with me. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15 ESV)

That's it. I wish that every Christian living in Canada right now would meditate on this simple verse. Here we learn a lesson that is going to be ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL in the days ahead.

The lesson is this: If you want to resemble Jesus, then you need to cultivate empathy.

We are called to resemble JESUS to the world! The one who is close to the broken-hearted and who comforts those who are crushed in spirit – the one who laid his hands on the unclean lepers and who left the 99 to go after the 1 – the one who said “Let the little children come to me” – the one who said that “it would be better to have a giant millstone attached to your neck and to be thrown into the depth of the sea than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.” Our task in this cultural moment is to resemble Jesus to the world.

Put all your politics and your agendas and your objections aside for one moment. Our neighbours are hurting. Just spend the next five minutes with me and do your best to empathize with what they are feeling right now.

Imagine our land was overtaken by a new culture – a people who didn't talk like us, or look like us, or worship like us. Imagine they came to your home dressed in their religious garb accompanied by their military. Imagine they knocked on your door, came into your house, and took your sweet children. There goes Luke, and Abi, and Noelle. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Imagine ten years later, Luke and Abi come home, but Noelle doesn't. She's buried somewhere in a field. And Luke and Abi don't want to talk about what happened to them, and Luke and Abi are never the same, and your community is full of families like yours that have been permanently scarred.

Another twenty years go by, and the culture that destroyed your family is seemingly oblivious. They live just a few kilometres from your community, and they don't have a clue why you hate coming into town. They don't

understand why suicide is so prevalent in your community. They don't understand why such a large portion of your community has turned to substance abuse.

Twenty-five more years go by, and someone finally discovers that field – the field where little Noelle was buried – and everyone stands up and says, “We had no idea! What a tragic chapter in our history!”

But it's not your history.

It's your present.

It's your community.

It's your baby.

Our neighbours are hurting. And I want more than anything to be able to point them to Jesus and to tell them that His Spirit dwells in our hearts and offers up groanings for us that are too deep for words, and I want to tell them that he has arms open wide and that it is only in him that we will ever find rest for our weary souls.

But they have a very different picture of Jesus. It was painted for them by people who claimed to be doing the Lord's work. Church family, how can we even begin to respond to this kind of pain? I would suggest that what we need to do in this moment is we need to learn how to weep with those who weep. But what does that even look like in a situation like this? That's the question we're going to ask this morning:

### How Can We Weep With Those Who Weep?

First, as we weep with those who weep, we need to:

1. Refuse to be indifferent

We are a culture that is saturated with news. Just a few months ago as we were reflecting on Philippians 4, I encouraged you to stop immersing yourself in problems that were not yours to bear. I told you that you don't need to fixate on every bit of bad news that social media spews out and that you some of you should pull out of social media altogether. I said that, and I meant that.

But that counsel doesn't apply here. This is a big problem that you DO need to read about. This is a big problem that you SHOULD concern yourself with. This is our story.

We can't afford to sit this one out. We can't afford to plug our ears and to close our eyes. If we care about evangelism at all – if we have any desire to reach our neighbours with the gospel – then we need to take the time to understand what has happened. The Apostle Paul was the greatest evangelist that the world has ever seen, and he always took the time that was needed to understand the people that he was ministering to. He wrote:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:20-23 ESV)

Paul understood that for evangelism to take place, certain barriers needed to be overcome. And, if he could overcome those barriers in a faithful way, then he would.

We live just five kilometres from the Chipewwas of Rama First Nation reserve. If we want to have ANY opportunity of reaching them with the gospel, then we can't bury our heads in the sand as this information is rolling out. We need to know what happened. We need to know what impact it has had on an entire generation of our neighbours. We need to know how we can pray. We need to know how we can help.

This was a nation-wide tragedy with generational effects. We are notorious for spending five minutes on an issue before moving onto what's next. We can't repeat that pattern here. If we're going to weep with those who weep, then we need to resist that urge to tap out and move on. We need to resist indifference.

Second, as we weep with those who weep, we need to:

2. Lay down the excuses

Just four weeks ago, as we gathered for our first all-together worship service in over a year, we were interrupted by people driving by shouting, “215 children!!! Shame on you!!!”

My first response, if I’m being honest, was to feel sorry for myself. I wanted to say, “But... it wasn’t us! But.. we’re not even Catholic! But... the problem is far more complex than you’re making it out to be!”

Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, the people who played a major role in this terrible chapter of our nation’s history did so under the banner of Christianity. They took children away from their parents and sought to eliminate a culture – and they did it in Jesus’ name.

Naturally, we want to distance ourselves from that tragedy. We want to educate our accusers about denominations and church autonomy but all of that sounds like a lousy excuse to them because all they can see is the picture of the man in a robe with a cross necklace carrying a child away from his weeping mother.

Christian, whether you like it or not, you do not have the luxury of making excuses on this issue. Your neighbour doesn’t want to hear them. Your neighbour is deep-down ANGRY at the church.

Do you remember last week how Matt mentioned that the law required the most expensive offerings to atone for the sin of leaders? The law taught us that sinful leadership led to devastating consequences for everyone. Well, we are feeling that right now, aren’t we? Our evangelism in the years and even generations to come is going to be that much harder because of the sins of the leaders of the past. The sins of previous leaders in the church have created an entire generation that associates the name of Jesus with oppression and destruction. When leaders sin, everyone suffers.

This is one of the major problems with our individualistic mindset. We deceive ourselves into thinking that our actions are isolated and that they don’t reflect on others. They do. And the actions of others reflect on us – whether we like it or not.

When people think about the residential school system, they will think about the church. Christian leaders sinned and the church was complicit. And while we are not THAT church, we are THE church. Whether or not you understand or agree with that, your neighbour does.

So, now is not the time for us to be sharpening our debate swords. Now is not the time for us to be arguing about how it's not fair to blame us for things that another church did. Now is the time for us to do what should have been done in the first place.

Now is the time for us to repent. We need to point at THAT, and to declare that it was wrong. We need to point at THAT and declare that the church did wrong. We need to repent.

Lay the excuses down. They're not going to be any help. They're not going to bring any healing. Take it on the chin, and repent for how miserably the church failed. Let's follow the example of our saviour who:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23 ESV)

If the perfectly innocent Jesus could stand silent as he was accused, then we can put our excuses away as we bear the culture's wrath for the sins of our fathers.

Next, if you want to weep with those who weep, then you need to:

### 3. Take time to listen

Read the reports that are coming out. Read the stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission<sup>1</sup>. Read the Calls to Action<sup>2</sup>. Better yet, reach out to some of the Indigenous people in your social circle and ask them how they are processing this season.

If we're going to weep with those who weep, then we need to take the time to hear their stories.

I confess that I have been absolutely embarrassed over this last month by my ignorance. Five years ago, I watched professional sports teams called the Washington Redskins, the Cleveland Indians and the Edmonton Eskimos and I didn't think anything of it. Some of the team logos even featured caricatures of Indigenous people. They were plastered onto t-shirts and worn around the city. Can you imagine what it must have felt like for a survivor of the residential school system to walk into a grocery store and to see the same

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.trc.ca>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

people that tried to obliterate your cultural distinctives using cartoons to profit off of your heritage? Can you imagine if we had a baseball team called the Georgia N-words that featured a cartoon of a black man holding a cotton ball? We are JUST NOW changing the names of these sports teams!

Have you ever stopped to think what kind of effect that level of systemic racism would have on a people? And yes, I'm using the word racism because that's what it was. It was an insensitive cash grab that made light of an unimaginably painful history. And it was so mainstream that it was happening right under our noses, and we didn't even notice!

Well, I notice now. And I'm embarrassed. And I'm ashamed. And I'm listening. I should have always been listening.

If we don't listen, then we'll never understand. And if we are going to weep with those who weep, then we need to understand just how deep this offence goes.

Finally, as we weep with those who weep we need to:

4. Learn so as not to repeat

As Christians, we understand the depravity of the human heart. The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

The heart is deceitful above all things,  
and desperately sick;  
who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV)

In humility, let's acknowledge that we are capable of tremendous evil. Our culture entertains the idea that we have finally arrived – that we are the first generation that has solved racism and that has overcome all the sins of our fathers. We tear statues down and we rip chapters out of history books and the underlying message in all of it is that WE will be the ones who will finally get it right.

Friends, we are not going to get it right. And, P.S., neither are the people who are tearing down the statues!

We all have blind spots.



We all have prejudice.

We all have the hearts that are prone to wander.

Therefore, while the world around is looking back at history and proclaiming with the pharisee:

'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (Luke 18:11b ESV)

We are called to adopt the posture of the tax collector:

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (Luke 18:13 ESV)

God be merciful.

What are we learning through all of this? That's a question that we will need to unpack for years, but I'd like to suggest three lessons that sit right at the surface.

## What Are We Learning?

For starters:

1. Political coercion is not a tool that Christians are to wield

Tolkien captured this so well in the Lord of the Rings. The ring represented power, and almost everyone was convinced that, if they were to possess the power, they would be able to set things right. But, of course, the power always corrupted.

Think about this: The darkest moments in Christian history all took place when Christians attempted to wield political power. The holy wars, the battles between Catholics and Protestants, the residential schools – they were all preceded by Christians who thought, "WOW! Once I finally wield the sword of the state, I'll be able to accomplish a world of good!" And, P.S., how incredibly foolish is it that in our generation – after all that we've

observed in history – we have YET ANOTHER generation of Christians absolutely FIXATING on seizing political power! Do we learn nothing?

The sword of the state does an awful job of resembling Christ of whom it was said:

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
<sup>3</sup>a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isaiah 42:2-3 ESV)

The gospel is not a by-law that you can impose upon people.

“But Pastor, are you suggesting that we should withdraw from the world?” No. I pray often that we would have more Christian lawyers and more Christian politicians and more Christian judges. I believe that we are called to serve in those places of leadership as salt and light and I do believe that Christians can bring about positive political change. Yes.

But I’m saying that politics is not the answer for the problem that plagues our world. The hope of the world is not found in the passing of a bill or the stopping of a bill – the hope of the world is neither a conservative, nor a liberal – the hope of the world is JESUS. And if history has taught us anything, it has taught us that until Jesus returns to set things right, the best of our leaders will leave us wanting, and the worst of our leaders will leave us reeling.

Political power is not what we should be after. It’s not what Jesus was after. We are engaged in a spiritual battle. We do the most good when we are fighting on our knees.

Here’s a second lesson that I hope we are learning in this season:

2. Cultural uniformity is antithetical to the gospel

Even if it were discovered that there were no children in those unmarked graves, the residential school system would STILL be a terrible tragedy. Because the residential school system represented a concerted effort to erase a culture.

Do you remember when we walked through the book of Daniel, and we read about how the Babylonians brought all the young Israelite men into captivity? Do you remember how they forced them to speak a different language and to eat different food and do you remember how they stripped them of their former names? The young Israelites were given new names that were intended to exalt the Babylonian gods. Daniel – whose Hebrew name means “My judge is God” was renamed Belteshazzar which roughly means “Nebo, protect his life”. Hananiah – whose name means “Yahweh has shown grace” was renamed Shadrach which means “The command of Aku.” Mishael – whose name means “Who is what God is?” was renamed Meshach which means “Who is what Aku is?” and Azariah – whose name means “God has helped” was renamed Abednego which means “servant of Nebo.”<sup>3</sup>

Can you imagine that? Azariah had been ripped from his home, robbed of his culture, and every time anyone wanted to address him, he would hear: “Hey, servant of Nebo, come over here!” When we preached through Daniel we stopped to say, “What a tragedy! Those Babylonians! How could they do that?!”

And yet, WE did that. That’s what happened at the residential schools.

And, lest we deceive ourselves into thinking that this was an isolated incident, let’s be honest and acknowledge that the church has historically struggled with this. We have often believed the evil lie that leading someone to Christ also includes erasing their cultural distinctives. We have often believed the lie that leading someone to Christ also includes teaching them to dress like us, to sing like us and to speak like us.

But that sad vision of the church – that vision of a monochromatic church that only spoke one language and that only dressed in a suit and tie and that only sang Chris Tomlin songs with acoustic guitar accompaniment – looks nothing like the scene we find in Revelation 9! John was lifted to see a vision of heaven and just listen to what he saw there:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Revelation 7:9a ESV)

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<sup>3</sup> See Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Daniel – Minor Prophets)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 7, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 34.

John saw diversity! John saw many nations and many tribes, and he heard many languages and the rich plurality only added to the BEAUTY of the worship that took place around the throne! When the true church that spans across the nations and across the ages comes together in worship, our culture is only going to represent a small sliver!

Therefore, if THAT is how this story ends, then our job is not to make Canadian Baptists; our job is to make disciples of Jesus and to make those disciples in ALL the nations!

This is why our approach to missions has shifted so radically over the years. Rather than sending our Canadian missionaries to Southeast Asia, we're using that same money to equip nationals to minister to their own people. The missionary strategy of sending the "great white hope" has been laid to rest, and let's pray that it stays there.

Oh how I pray that this church will increasingly resemble that scene in Revelation. Oh how I pray that we will see great plurality and diversity in the years to come! Oh that God would bring young and old, and rich and poor, and white and black, and expressive and reserved, and oh that we would be a living illustration to the world that the gospel has power to bring people TOGETHER! Jesus didn't come to eradicate culture – he came to breath gospel LIFE into culture and to unite it all into one beautiful tapestry with Christ at the centre!

We all have a sinful voice in our hearts that leads us to believe that God wants us to make clones of ourselves.

He doesn't.

One Levi is enough. Amen?

And I will so rejoice on the day when an indigenous brother or sister comes to worship with us dressed in their traditional garb and dances and rejoices unto the Lord, and I'm praying in faith that that day will come. Because the gospel is for all the nations. Amen? Amen.

And finally, in all of this I am freshly reminded that:

3. Our Indigenous neighbours need to hear the truth about Jesus

Perhaps this feels like a counter-intuitive note to land on in a sermon like this, but it's the note that I want you to hear loud and clear.

I had second thoughts about preaching this sermon, but it wasn't because I wasn't sure what needed to be said. The Lord laid that on my heart, and it felt very clear. My concern, however, was about how you would hear this. My concern was with the motives that you might be tempted to assume in me. So let me close by making my motives loud and clear:

We are talking about this today because Indigenous people need to hear the truth about Jesus! They were lied to. The gospel was misrepresented. They were handed a counterfeit and it had no power to save.

And that breaks my heart. Our Indigenous neighbours need to meet the true Jesus.

He is the answer to all the wrongs that have been done. He is the only one who can heal. He is the only one who can restore. He is the hope and the light and the life and the way home.

I want to share that good news! But right now, there is an enormous chasm between us and the Indigenous community. And I am afraid that, rather than doing the hard work of bridging that chasm, we will turn away from our neighbours and justify our actions with a world of excuses.

"The distrust just runs too deep. The chasm is too great. Reconciliation is impossible."

No! Absolutely not! I refuse to believe that. Nothing is impossible with our God! He builds bridges and He mends relationships, and He restores trust. He can do all of that!

But if we want to see any of that happen. If we want to see the door for evangelism open again for our neighbours, then we need to take the first step. We need to understand. We need to weep. We need to love. We need to repent. And then, perhaps we will have an opportunity to introduce our neighbours to the God that they were wrongly introduced to in the past.

Would you join me in praying to that end?