

Hello TUMC, I'm grateful that I can be speaking today, on the first of two peace Sundays. I've been thinking a lot about peace these past few weeks in preparation for this morning. A sort of phrase, or chant, that's been in my head while I've been thinking about today is a chant that was said while I was at a few different rallies this summer. "No justice, no peace, no racist police". What does peace mean in a time when we, or the larger "we" feel like we don't have peace? We hear of Injustice systems where police get away with brutality or murder. What does that mean in our church context, no justice no peace? What does peace mean today? How do we determine when we're at peace? To me, peace has always been a response to war. It's always, if we're not at war then we're at peace. Or, perhaps that's a development from remembrance day ceremonies. But we're not at War and yet so many don't feel at peace. I don't know how to sit with that.

I was reading online, and I think that we're all coming to realize here in Canada and in North America, that racism won't go away until we stop seeing it as a black problem or an indigenous problem or a problem for people of colour but rather that it is a white problem, white people need to be the ones to respond to this. We need to do better, so what does better look like? In June Alyse and I became aware of some resources that were created online to share black and Indigenous-owned businesses in Toronto. So we started trying to frequent some of them. This included some new restaurants to try and gift cards that we were giving away. But so far it's not enough, obviously. Systemic racism isn't going to stop because we started frequently purchasing food from the local takeout.

I always find it a really interesting topic of thinking or talking about peace. Especially on peace Sunday, because the peace that I'm constantly thinking about is peace on a larger scale than just me as an individual. And it's larger than just our immediate Church community. This summer I had the opportunity to be working on the show *yellow bellies* with theatre of the beat. It's a show about conscientious objectors during World War II. Which I think for many of us and myself included is sort of the go-to image when we think about peace Sunday here in the Mennonite, peace-church context. One

line that really stuck out to me while recording yellow bellies the Audio Drama, was the line “to be in the world but not of it.” I think this is another one of those phrases that is sort of a go-to Mennonite-ism. My character Rudy asks in response to that “so what does that mean, that there's no place for me?” Modern-day Mennonites, I believe, owe a lot of our activism to the conscientious objectors that came out of World War II. I think prior to the war there was really the sense of being in the world but not of it. But afterwards, I think there was more of a sense that “no, we can't go back to the world as it was before, because that world doesn't exist anymore.”

As I was talking to Audrey this week about what I was preaching about she asked “okay so what does conscientious objectors have to do with the sermon series of what is being revealed?” I think that history repeats itself. I think what's happening right now is we are realizing that we can no longer go back to the world that was prior to covid-19 we can no longer go back to the world that was prior to the death of George Floyd, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Ejaz Ahmed Choudry, Breonna Taylor, Chantel Moore, Rodney Levi or the brutal beating of Dafonte Miller, and many more. That world doesn't exist anymore. We can't go back. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Jesus tells us to mourn when it's time to mourn and to be hungry for justice and righteousness when it's time to be hungry and thirsty.

This morning I had the opportunity to talk to the youth about my sermon, and the themes I wanted to cover. We had a great discussion about the “before times”, the sort of, pre-covid stuff. But then we also talked about, okay, if we don't want to go back to the “old normal” what changes do we want to see come out of 2020, here are some of their ideas: Less greenhouse gases. Better respect and understanding of people's feelings. A good balance of working or schooling from home, or in person at an office or school. Reaching out to friends and family who live at a distance. It's a great thing to start new hobbies. Utilizing the parks and green spaces around us. Seeing wildlife return to places that humans have dominated for a long time. Encouraging people to take sick days. Supporting small businesses. In 2020 there has been more awareness around gender rights, and the black lives matter movement. Social media has seen a

big change with people sharing less beach pictures and more images of social change they want to see. We have more time to reflect on the injustice we see. "Distance doesn't matter as much" - not that physically distancing doesn't matter, but we can be aware of challenges facing people from far away.

At some of the rallies I was at this summer, I saw many that were hungry and thirsty for righteousness, but they were not filled.

On June 29th, Toronto held a town hall meeting to discuss the potential of defunding the police by 10%. For those that didn't watch the 8-hour town hall as I did, I can summarize. They didn't defund, and John Tory passed a motion to increase the budget to cover the costs of body-worn cameras. Unfortunately, the jury is out about whether body cameras are helpful or not. Canadian data is very limited, and American studies have mixed results. Toronto activist, journalist, and author of "The Skin We're In", Desmond Cole says, "Body cameras are the new tasers, the new technological wonder that allows us to avoid calling out police brutality. We change the equipment, but the violent behaviour continues."

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. While I was working on yellow bellies I did some more research into the "internment" of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Have you heard much about this? Starting in 1942 some 21,000 Japanese Canadians were taken from their homes on Canada's West Coast without any charge or due process. Today, there are just over 10,000 Canadians that have died from covid-19, so, if we double the number of covid-19 deaths, we get how many Japanese Canadians were wrongfully removed from their homes. Conscientious objector camps also started Around 1942, but there were only approx. 5000 Mennonite CO's, and around 11,000 total CO's. Under international law, internment refers to the detention of enemy aliens. But about 77 percent of the Japanese Canadians involved were British subjects, and 60 percent were born in Canada. (Before 1947, both people born in Canada and naturalized immigrants were considered British subjects; in other words, they were citizens of the

Commonwealth. Canadian citizenship came into effect in January 1947.) So, since many weren't "Enemy Aliens", but Canadians, terms suggested instead of "Internment" include incarceration, expulsion, detention and dispersal. There is even debate if they should be called concentration camps.

When Canada declared war on Germany in September 1939, political leaders in Ottawa introduced a military draft. Political leaders in British Columbia however insisted that the Canadian-born Japanese people should be excluded from any conscription. The reasoning? If Japanese Canadians were called for military service, they would have a strong argument for voting rights. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, who considered Japan a potential enemy agreed and Japanese Canadians were excluded from the draft. After Pearl Harbor in December 1941 political leaders seized the opportunity, They accused Japanese Canadians of being spies and saboteurs. They called for drastic action to protect the West Coast. Japanese Canadian fishermen were required to turn in their boats, which were later sold by the authorities. But there were no mass arrests or immediate action. The RCMP found no evidence of sabotage or military threat. The chiefs of the Canadian Army and Navy vigorously denied that Japanese Canadians posed a danger or threat of any importance. However, a cabal of politicians and lobbyists in British Columbia began campaigning for the removal or confinement of Japanese Canadians in the coastal regions.

I could go on, but I will sum up what happens next. The men are to be sent off to Road labour camps or Lumber camps, similar to Mennonite conscientious objectors. however, the women and children are to be separated from men, and left in Vancouver. All the while, their homes and properties and stuff are auctioned off. Some Japanese men protest and refused to go to the camps they hide in Vancouver. Eventually, the Canadian government decides to round all of them up and send them as family units to these internment-concentration camps, just off the coast.

Also unlike the Mennonite conscientious objectors, the forced-labour of Japanese Canadians was not paid. They were not provided with adequate food, clothing, or

shelter. They were allowed to use what little savings they might have had, and if the sale of their house and property was successful through the province, they were only allowed to withdraw \$100 a month from the money they received from the sale of the property. If you want to learn more I suggest you look up the podcast “The secret life of Canada” and their episode “Where is Japantown”

Like I said before, History repeats itself. This story tragically parallels what is going on in the states at ICE, the immigration centres. Families are separated. And just revealed in the last few weeks there's been a doctor or doctors performing hysterectomies without consent, to predominantly Spanish speaking detainees. According to Article 2 of the genocide convention, the treaty adopted by the United Nations, imposing measures intended to prevent births in a group is a definition of genocide.

So yes, Mennonites faced challenges and discrimination for choosing to be conscientious objectors during WWII, but due to our white privilege, we were paid for our work, and allowed to keep our land and homes (for the most part). I really love what Mennonite CO's stood for, and love telling their stories, especially through Yellow Bellies. I think though, if anything, It's a reminder of why we must speak up for the injustices we see today. To remember is to work for peace. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

If you haven't read the book Peaceful at Heart: Anabaptist Reflections on Healthy Masculinity, edited by Don Neufeld (Aaron's dad) and Steve Thomas, I highly recommend it. I also have insider information that an audiobook version of it may be on the way, along with a study guide, and a full interview series with all the authors... My inside information is that I'll be working on those things... Ask me later about that. I have a few favourite chapters in this book. But the one that was speaking to me this week was by Hyung Jin Kim Sun, or Pablo as we know him at TUMC. Side note, I also really enjoyed Pieter Niemeyer's chapter, but I'll have to get into that a different week. Pablo talks about the conscription that is enforced by the South Korean government. I didn't realize this before reading his chapter, but technically North and South Korea are

still at war with each other. The Korean War which was from 1950 to 1953, kind of, was the start of this forced conscription that South Korea still has to this day. Now, unlike here in Canada, conscientious objectors in Korea are immediately put in prison. Now, if you go to prison, you face many of the same challenges that ex-inmates face here in North America. You lose your right to vote, you lose your opportunity for many different jobs and people generally assume the worst of you. The other complication is that the military is also tied with masculinity.

Pablo writes: “the military has been mandatory for all able-bodied men, but beginning in the mid-1990s, some were excluded as delinquents, orphans, transsexuals, and men who have difficulty sustaining their dependents. There are legitimate reasons for the government's exemptions, or better, exclusion, of these groups of people from the service, but according to sociologists Seungsook Moon, men in these groups are excluded because the government views them as untrustworthy, undesirable, or unsuitable for service. In other words, men with a disability and those who are categorized as belonging to one of these groups are not viewed as normal men who function well. Not only that, but those who choose to be conscientious objectors, for religious or non-religious reasons, are also considered unmanly. Military values and norms affect profoundly how the society sees those who for whatever reason to not do military service. These men are permanently stigmatized, and their stigma impedes them at every turn, hampering their ability to find a job and belong to a community. This burden is especially difficult to bear in South Korea because the Society is communal and therefore less tolerant than westerners are of those who do not conform to communal standards and expectations.”

In case you didn't know, I'm a playwright. I like to write plays. I haven't written it yet, but I want to write a play, that takes place in the future, where we don't need passports anymore because there are no more borders. In this play, I see the process started by the United Nations coming out with a citizen of the world program. Young and enthusiastic Greta Thunberg generation students are coming of age just in time to sign up for this pilot program. I also see a lot of push back to this program and those who

sign up. I see the play dealing with current justice issues. Perhaps, there'll be a scene similar to the end of segregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Or perhaps there's a scene where it's parallel to the white supremacy we saw in Charlottesville 3 years ago. Perhaps the president is asked to come in and end this and instead he says "to stand by and stand down". But, I see it as a play of hope, a play of the way forward. They're able to work and live where they choose. Perhaps this entire program will be started by these young University students that created it at a model UN debate. Perhaps that's what angers people the most is that it was an idea by the youth, and it could 'never work.' 'That's just not the way things are done.'

This spring I was gearing up to go on tour with Theatre of the Beat with our show Selah's song. It's an original musical, with music written by Bryan Moyer Suderman, and written by Johnny Wideman from Theatre of the Beat. You heard one of our songs just before the service began today. The musical tells the story of this young girl whose courage inspires a village and whose song becomes an anthem for peace. Selah is excited to hear that her father is coming home from war, but, the joy of having her family reunited is short-lived when there's this very harsh war tax started. Catchy pro-war propaganda songs pop up and Selah is inspired to share her own music with the village. Johnny originally wrote this show back in 2014. We asked him back in February why he wanted to do it again in 2020 and he talked about Greta Thunberg. Here's what he said: "Greta catalyzed a movement where children began taking to the streets in protest. Kids were skipping school, not to play, or go to the mall, but to demand big changes from our world leaders, and asking past generations to finally acknowledge the ways in which we have jeopardized their futures. Perhaps it was something about the innocence of these young activists or the reminder that it's our children who will inherit this future, but it seemed to snap us out of our jaded, apathetic ennui. And so, in 2020, apathy is no longer an option. 2020 is a year for inspiring action, for finding inspiration, and for remembering that anyone - even a powerless, young peasant girl like Selah, can change the world."

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Okay, so, let's take a breath here. *Pause* Where do we go from here, on this peace Sunday? I think we need to love. Today's reading is from Jesus when he is sharing his famous Sermon on the Mount. I wonder if it was to directly juxtapose the 10 commandments, what we heard in Exodus today. Instead of thou shalt nots, we get blessed are they's. I think the underlying message of the Beatitudes, is love. How can you mourn, be pure of heart, show mercy or strive for peace without love? To confirm this for me, later in this chapter, still on the mount Jesus says we need to love our enemies.

In this increasingly polarized world, somedays our neighbours can feel like our enemies. But, we must love. To love our enemies though, we must love ourselves. Jesus says love your neighbour as yourself. SO, If you're currently in a room with someone, I want you to turn to them, if you're alone right now, look at yourself on zoom. When you've turned, I want you to say, I love myself. Go ahead.

Now, since my job is working with the youth and children, I feel like it's my duty to keep you all current on the hip new things that the youth of today are into. I want to share a short 1-minute audio clip. This audio comes from a rapper named Childish Gambino, on his newest album. 3.15.20

Watch the clip.

Amen.