

Welcome and invocation

Thank you all for coming. I am very excited to be gathering here with you today. Before we begin this morning, I want to start by orienting ourselves and our discussion, reminding us all of why we gather and what we share. In the middle of this circle I have placed a few objects that are simple visual reminders of things that are important to us. As we speak to each other, and as we listen to each other, looking at these objects will help us remember some of our core beliefs that should influence how we speak and how we listen.

In this circle we have a bible to remind us that we gather as Jesus-followers and we gather in his spirit of humility, love and radical welcome. We have a map of this area to remind us that where we gather, and that we gather in a place with a history, some of which we know some of which we do not, and that we are not independent of this history. We also have some dirt from this property to remind us that we, like all people, are people that come from land, are connected to the earth, and that we forget our connection to the earth where we live are our own peril. To forget or ignore our connection to creation and the earth that gives us life is to live in a place of dangerous ignorance. Let us pray that all we do around this circle is influenced by our connection to those things that are represented by the objects in this middle.

Overview

In the opening piece of *Yours, mine, ours*, "Pulling the threads of Discovery," editor and writer Cheryl Woelk asks "How do we really learn the things that change our lives?" This is a very good question and a very good question to focus on at the beginning. If I may speak for all of us here today, I would say that we are not interested in just acquiring information that does not affect us, like buying a gym membership that is not used. We are interested in learning things that will change our lives. We are participating in this process because we believe that the future can be different from the past. We believe in a God that uses his people to work for the restoration of all things: people, places, relationships. We are here because we want to understand how things are, and how they came to be, so that we might work towards a different future. We want to be changed.

Although it might seem to some to be a minor point, I do want to clarify that we are gathered here today not as representatives of the government, and not, I would argue, primarily as Canadian citizens. Of course there are multiple aspects to our identity and our citizenship cannot be removed from our other associations, but I would say that it is important that we consider the idea that we are here today primarily as Jesus followers. The government, and by extension its citizens, has its own set of concerns and responsibilities. We are also concerned and may be connected to some of these responsibilities, but for now - for this gathering - we are primarily focused on thinking about the issues at hand from the perspective of our identities as Jesus-followers.

In the introductory material that I put on the webpage for these classes, I say that we are embarking on this process of learning because we have been called to action. One of the calls to action from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada is a specific call to action for churches. We have been asked to do our part in working towards a better future, a future of healthy relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. What have we been called to action to do? We have been asked to explore, reject, and remove from our churches beliefs and doctrines that have supported the exploitation of Indigenous peoples. We have been asked to repudiate beliefs that are known to have been used to justify European superiority.

I say all this partly to clarify what we are not here to do. I do not claim to be leading a group that will result in Reconciliation. I am not sure what Reconciliation means, or looks like and I do not

feel like I could claim for this group or for this church that we are as yet moving down the path of reconciliation. Perhaps we will look back some years from now and say, yes, this was part of reconciliation. But for my part, I think of these classes as playing a certain preparatory role in reconciliation, which is truth-telling and truth-hearing. After all, the first word and work of the TRC is “Truth”.

I also want to clarify that I am not interested in leading a group that focuses on debating issues of the distant past, and what, if anything, we are responsible for in learning about the sins of our ancestors. I am not interested in debating the moral purity of indigenous peoples pre-contact. Our obligations to participate in this process are not because ‘they’ are good and ‘we’ are bad. However, there are three reasons why I think it is important for us to spend some time on the past. One, we cannot change what we have not faced, and most of us know almost nothing about the well-documented, but out of sight, history of our country. Two, for many people in our country, the past is not past. The issues of colonization, exploitation, and oppression are not issues of the dark recesses of time. They live on in the experiences of systemic poverty, abuse, suicide and other legacies of intergenerational trauma. Third, I believe that as people who are fundamentally attached to ideas of a hopeful future, Christians are resurrection people!, we want to understand why things have happened, and why they are happening, so that we might do and be something different.

Some might correctly point out that the past is not sorely marked by injustice, and that there are many stories of good and healthy relations between Indigenous and non-indigenous in Canadian history. This is true, but for our present purposes it is also mostly besides the point. While it is important to learn about and be influenced by the positive stories of the past and present, I believe that in order to do the hard work of ‘truth-hearing’ there needs to be time set aside to listen and hear the darker parts of the past without giving ourselves the emotional release of uplifting counter examples. Simply put, most of us do not know the breadth and extent of the effects of colonialism on the lives of our indigenous neighbours, and I believe that if we are interested in participating in a process of learning that may change us, we have to be willing to sit and hear the darker stories of our country. I am not sure that avoiding experiences that make us uncomfortable, or even sad and angry, will help us in our desire to change. I also think that many times when we move quickly from hard stories to hopeful ones we do so out of an unacknowledged desire to relieve ourselves from the difficulty of the process, but as I said last week, why should we give ourselves a speedy emotional release when there are many people who are currently living without having yet experienced restoration and healing.

There is going to be time and space in future weeks to hear and share positive stories of hope, but I believe that one way we can honour those who have, and continue to live in the midst of the colonial legacy of abuse and injustice is by setting aside time to hear and be affected by what we hear. When survivors testified to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission they did not ensure that the reports of abuse and cultural genocide were balanced by positive reports in order to buoy up the spirits of those witnessing the proceedings.

This brings us to today. Even though many of us may not, until recently, have heard of the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’, this does not mean that it has not played a role in the life that you have lived. There are many laws, international trade agreements, and treaties that impact our lives every day, and we would likely not be able to name even a small percentage of them. There is a well-documented history of the ‘Doctrine of Discovery’ and its role in unhealthy relationships here in Canada.

First response:

1. What, if anything, did you take away from last week?

2. Did the discussion last week leave you with any questions?
3. If you read anything before this class, what stood out to you?
4. Is there anything you hope to discuss or cover today?

Land, Bodies & Stories

Bodies

Still Questioning - Bryan Outerbridge

Land

My Car - Two person, one act play with two volunteers

Stories

From both ends of the pipe - Dayna Dueck

Material not covered

Land

There are three things I want to draw our attention to as we spend some time exploring the doctrine of discovery today. These three things are the three primary points of contact I see between the doctrine of discovery, Indigenous people and ourselves. The three points of contact are 'land', 'bodies', and 'stories'.

For those of you who have had a chance to read parts of the book you will have noticed that the most discussed connection to the doctrine of discovery was the possession (and dispossession) of land in the Americas. There are several pieces in the book that provide details on how so-called european 'explorers' acted under the auspices of documents and direction provided by european powers that directly linked their actions in North America to the freedoms given by the doctrine of discovery. What is especially fascinating, at least for me, is that the doctrine has been referenced and employed in decisions by the supreme court, in both Canada and the US, as recently as 2010. Land and the resources of the land, is essentially the direct target and purpose of the doctrine.

pg. 23 Johnson v. M'Intosh

Perhaps the most important thing to take away from this passage is the basis for this legal ruling and its subsequent use in law. The denial of Indigenous rights, their right to dispose of land or use it as they see fit, is not based on a claim of european powers having conquered the Indigenous peoples of North America. It is based on the invented idea that because europeans claimed to be superior, have a superior religion and civilization, their claims to the land are legitimate.

1. Have you heard about the doctrine of discovery before this group?
2. Has anything surprised you?
3. Does hearing about the legal justification for denial of indigenous land rights in the americas make you feel anything?
4. What is the connection between these discussions of Discovery and land mean for the land where we live?