

**Sermon Notes – April 29, 2018**  
**“Reconciliation in the Bible and Today”**  
**Brian Walton**

Your Affirming Action Committee gave me a tough assignment for this morning’s reflection. (show slide) Their question: “How does the Biblical view of reconciliation contribute to the “Call for Reconciliation” issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?” I know that sounds kind of heady but I discovered that when we really dig into reconciliation it grabs us in our guts. Pam Palmater (slide of Palmater) is an Indigenous woman, practicing lawyer and associate professor at Ryerson University in Toronto states: “If it doesn’t feel uncomfortable, it’s not real reconciliation – the feel good stuff tends to be superficial ...”

Indeed, when we look at reconciliation in scripture we immediately encounter words such as sin and judgment. Most of us don’t like the word sin – we think it is outdated, or has something to do with sex, or simply makes us feel bad. You might recall that when we were doing the sermon series on ‘churchy words’ I revisited the term suggesting that I understood (show slide with definition) sin as “relentless self-interest at the expense of others.” The Bible assumes that all of humanity is plagued by this relentless self-interest and that it distances us from God, the source of Love

Reconciliation is composed (show slide) of the Latin verb “concile” or to “bring together”. Adding the prefix “re” suggests bringing together again something that was apart. Hence to reconcile, is to bring together again something that used to exist together. We have sometimes heard of

separated persons choosing to 'reconcile,' to bring themselves together again in marriage.

The Bible assumes that God and humanity are intended to be together. The ancient covenants have God stating, "I will be your God and you will be my people." That is the goal but, as noted, relentless self-interest at the expense of others stands in opposition to God's expectation that we will love one another. Traditional Christian belief suggests that Jesus came to reconcile us with God, as our own United Church Creed suggests. (show creed slide)

Let's review – (Three slides in close succession: slide one) The relationship between God and humanity is broken by our relentless self-interest at the expense of others. (slide two) In his life, death and teachings Jesus becomes the agent of reconciliation by showing that God persists in loving us and by demonstrating that we can respond by loving one another. This sounds simple, but as any couple whose worked at reconciliation can attest, reconciliation requires effort. (slide three) Reconciliation requires that we recognize our brokenness, seek forgiveness, and be prepared to repent or change our ways.

Perhaps this is no better explanation of the process of reconciliation than the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Most of us have heard of the 12-step program for sobriety. The steps include recognizing brokenness (steps 1, 2 & 3), seeking forgiveness (steps 4, 5, & 6) and changing one's life (steps 7 to 10) and finally experiencing God's reconciliation (steps 11 & 12). Consuming so much alcohol that it negatively affects our relationship with ourselves, with others and with God is one form of relentless self-

interest. The twelve-step program seeks to reconcile this brokenness. Let's look at the steps more closely.

### **(slide)** Recognizing our brokenness

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

### **(slide)** Seeking forgiveness

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

### **(slide)** Engaging Repentance/Making a change

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

### **(slide)** Embracing Reconciliation

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The 12-step process of reconciliation is informative as we contemplate the TRC's call to reconciliation. Pam Palmeter, the Aboriginal lawyer and academic suggested in her lecture at the University of Regina that reconciliation was a multi-step process that begins with Truth-telling about the experience of Indigenous people in Canada; followed by enacting justice to right the wrongs created by an oppressive history; and only then reconciling relationships so that we might live in harmony as Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In conclusion I apply this 12-step model to the call for reconciliation with indigenous persons.

### (slide) Recognizing our brokenness

1. We admitted we were powerless over the power of racism which can cause us to see Indigenous persons as “less than” us; and cause us to view the historical oppression of reservations, treaty agents and residential schools as nothing more than historical footnotes.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity; namely that God calls away from racism to love our neighbour and to recognize that neighbour as anyone as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God and to have God to lead us in the journey of reconciliation with Indigenous persons.

### (slide) Seeking forgiveness

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves – acknowledging the profound oppressions experienced by Indigenous persons – e.g. forced starvation and the trading of sex for food and the horrendous abuses of the residential schools and the sixties scoop and the generations of dysfunction that has ensued.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. In addition to acknowledging these devastating historical facts recognizing how internalized racism still shapes my relationship with Indigenous persons.

### (slide) Engaging Repentance/Making a change

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all the ways in which colonial culture harmed Indigenous people, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible .. by living up to treaty promises, adequately funding education and health care to the same level as non-Indigenous communities, working alongside Indigenous communities to secure viable economic opportunities and more.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we discovered our own racist perspective re-appearing to challenge them or invite others to challenge them.

**(slide) Embracing Reconciliation**

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him ... to finally live the reality of the term "all my relations" and understand ourselves as brothers and sisters of one Creator.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of meaningful relationships with Indigenous persons - taking the message of reconciliation to all we meet.