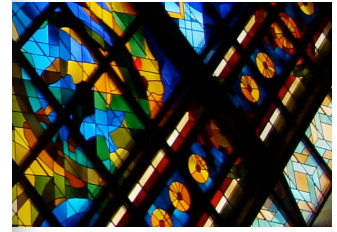




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 16

I Can Hear You in Your Silence

Alwin Jayaveera Maben



Learning

Racism exists in Canada. As a racialized Asian living in Canada for the last 11 years, I'm compelled to express my pathos lest all Canadian friends should think that they are all open, welcoming, and accepting everyone as equals. I specifically would like to speak to those whom I consider friends and well-meaning Canadians, so that they can hear and understand what I am speaking about.

I believe that many White Canadians might live in denial that racism exists in the church and in Canadian society. Among other experiences of racism, what I wish to address here is the *silence* of those I consider well-meaning White Canadian friends. I'm sure that their silence over injustices done to Indigenous and racialized person/s is more often in defense of their own privilege, if not for their own survival within their community. It might also be due to their acceptance and understanding of silence as a human virtue or a sign of maturity. While I understand and accept that silence can be a true virtue, it can't be so in

the face of injustice. It is when we start listening and understanding the pains of others, especially that of Indigenous and racialized person/s, however small that might be.

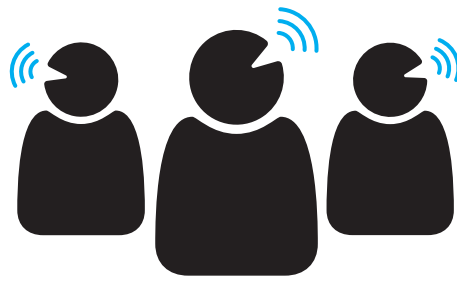
What is said above cannot be generalized, for there are some who have empathized and stood with me in the context of injustice done, and I am grateful to them. Yet many have opted to remain silent or seemingly helpless. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." It is the silence of those whom I consider friends which really pains me. Would things have been better if they chose to voice their opinion or speak against injustice? I do not know. But they chose to remain silent, and that's all I remember.

Well, I too was once like you. I chose to remain silent, to not to speak about the injustices happening within The United Church of Canada. I feared the consequences of speaking honestly. I must confess that I remained silent when many Indigenous and racialized brothers and sisters stood up to

Forgive me for my assumption—I may be wrong—but I read, I feel, and I understand your silence as being as oppressive as that of the oppressors. What I have always heard from my well-meaning friends is sympathizing words, when what I needed was empathizing action. They were for equality when what was needed is equity.

voice and share their pathos at the 43rd General Council. But then I learned and realized through my involvement and interaction with intercultural ministries that I must speak the truth, even when my voice shakes. I must remain strong and tell the truth even when it makes enemies. As Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free." That's my calling to be a disciple of Christ. That's our calling to be the faith community that practices empathy and equity more than sympathy and equality.

I do not have to apologize for speaking my truth and in asking my well-meaning White, privileged Canadian friends for their understanding, to take the time to listen to what Indigenous and racialized people are saying, rather than judging or being silent at injustices done to them, to empathize with and promote equity for all marginalized, racialized, and oppressed sisters and brothers. The love of Christ binds the human race, and



invites us to practice not just what we consider ideal, but what the context demands. To be able to colour outside the lines as Jesus did. To care for the least and the lost.

To remember when we consider silence as a virtue, that it can also be a sin.

So, let's not be the followers of Christ who just watch in silence and do nothing, lest our churches and societies be destroyed by those who practice and promote racism openly or silently. Let's be the ones to hear what the spirit is saying to the Church through the experiences of Indigenous and racialized peoples.



Faith Reflection

Adele Halliday

God, who has loved us into being,
At times when we feel weak,
 when we feel uncertain
 or we feel we do not know how to pray,
We trust that Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
Help us to rely on your Spirit to strengthen us,
 to give us resilience and resolve and
 to respond to your call to work towards racial equity.
Help us to resist the temptation to remain passive
 that your Spirit continue to stir us out of complacency
 and that we will have the courage to name and challenge racial injustices.
Your word reminds us protest and praise can come from unexpected places:
 Rocks cry out
 Mountains leap
 Trees clap their hands
 Creation groans
We pray that we too might name truth and justice in all times and places.
May we follow the example of Jesus in our words and actions,
 who preached liberation from oppression,
 who challenged power and privilege,
 and who inspires us to work for justice and equality.
May it be so.
Amen.



Children's Activity

Adele Halliday

Invite the children to reflect on a recent time or a situation that felt unfair to them. What happened at the time?

Initially, some children may choose to share situations that happened at play or with other children—such as a time of playing together and another child did not share their toys, or if another child of the same age was calling them a bad name that made them upset, or if they raised their hand first at school but were not called on to share their response to a question.

Why did they think was it unfair? Did anyone help them deal with the situation? Who helped them and how? How did it feel to have someone help you?

Then, invite them to think about a time when something unfair happened to them but no one helped them or listened to them. How did they feel when no one helped or listened?

Some children may already understand social justice—the concept that all people deserve equal rights and opportunities (such as economic, political, and social). Invite them to think of social justice situations that are unfair (if they cannot think of any, they might need some prompting). As children, how might they respond to social justice situations that are unfair? What might they do? What might they also ask others to respond? Feel free to affirm that

some social injustices might seem too big for children to respond to on their own—and that there is still something that can be done, that they can work together with other children and adults, and that they can still act. Affirm that they can play an important role when situations at play or in the world are unfair.



Group Commitment

Adele Halliday

Reflect on ways that you could commit to engaging with anti-racism with actions that go beyond spoken words. Be creative!

- Could you create a simple sign that you put in your window at home or your workplace?
- Is there a button that you could wear?

- Are you an artist who could paint or draw and display your creation?
- Is there an installation that you could make and show to others?
- Is there a drama or creative performance that you could share?

This day invites us to move beyond being passive, and to be actively anti-racist. Could you commit to doing this in creative way?



Advocacy

Adele Halliday

One way to advocate is for people with racial privilege to amplify the perspectives, action, and work of Indigenous and racialized peoples calling for racial equity on a particular issue.

What might different Indigenous and racialized peoples be asking for on a particular issue—for example, on education, health care, immigration, or within the church?

The role of advocacy for White people might be to work alongside Indigenous and racialized communities who are already naming injustices and calling for advocacy and action. If you are Indigenous or racialized, what might other Indigenous and racialized communities be working on; how might you be an advocate working in solidarity with them?



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Adele Halliday uses she/her pronouns and serves as the Anti-Racism and Equity Lead staff at the General Council Office of The United Church of Canada. She staffs the United Church's Anti-Racism Common Table, and has been involved in anti-oppression work with churches in Canada and beyond for many years.

