

UNSETTLING THE WORD

✕ Study Guide ✕

vol. 1



Prepared by
The Student Christian Movement of Canada

INTRODUCTION



This is one of three unique study guides engaging different sets of contributions from *Unsettling the Word: Biblical Experiments in Decolonization*. This guide is primarily intended for small groups meeting regularly for a few hours at a time. Yet it can also be used for individual study, or to supplement other uses of *Unsettling the Word* (e.g., as a sermon resource).

This study guide was prepared by the Student Christian Movement of Canada, an ecumenical, grassroots, student-led movement that aims to explore and express the meaning of Jesus' life and ministry to the world today. We are part of the ongoing international ecumenical movement for justice and peace.

Whether you are studying as part of an official Student Christian Movement group or not, we are glad that you are making use of this resource.

Peter Haresnape
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<https://www.commonword.ca/go/1552>

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

What follows are two suggested outlines for how to go about your study sessions, one aimed at groups and the other at individuals. Each study session will follow the same outline, using a set of questions designed specifically for the relevant piece from *Unsettling the Word*. This guide covers 23 of the pieces, and subsequent guides (Volumes 2 & 3) will explore the remaining pieces.

In each of these outlines, you will engage scripture and a series of questions designed to explore how you relate to that particular Bible passage. For some, the idea of talking about the Bible can be daunting, but no prior knowledge is required. In fact, the most fruitful conversations come from a group with different levels of experience, and the capacity to speak freely and hear from one another.

On the whole, engaging scripture should be done from the perspective that there is not a “right answer” to reach, and that different perspectives can share the same space. Always be aware that anyone can react negatively to the passages we are examining, especially given that our focus is on decolonization, which means we are exploring difficult biblical texts that have to do with violence, genocide, sexual oppression, and colonialism. It is very important to hear and make space for these realities without trying to “fix” or “heal” them, and without trying to redeem scripture from the sins of colonialism.

GROUP STUDY: A SUGGESTED OUTLINE

In preparation for your group study, encourage members to read and reflect on the scripture in advance. If someone is not able to join one of the sessions, recommend that they still read the scripture.

- ***Personal check-in.***

- » Take some intentional time to hear from each other. This is not just community building—it helps everyone identify what gifts and challenges they are bringing into the study. If your group is familiar with one another, you can ask for a general check-in. Otherwise, consider asking participants to respond to one of the following questions, or something inspired by the readings:

- Personal description of identity—Indigenous, Settler, Newcomer, Visitor—and what it means to you.
- Place of birth and the Indigenous people(s) associated with it.
- The treaty of your place of residence and another agreement that is important in your life.
- A book, film, or story (other than the Bible) which is meaningful to you.
- An important relationship with someone not present.
- A special place that you like to visit.

- ***Begin by reading the suggested selection of scripture.***

- » Consider what makes sense: sharing the readings among the group, assigning parts, or having one confident reader for each piece.
- » If possible, have a printout of the scripture or a copy of the Bible for everyone, but use a single Bible for the reading, passing it around.

- » If the scripture was assigned for homework and time is tight, read aloud the epigraph in the book, making sure that everyone has access to the scripture text, and then go to the questions below.
- **Respond to the scripture.**
 - » Have the group facilitator or a participant read aloud one or more of the following questions.
 - What is your history with this story? For example, have you heard it before or is it new to you? Does it remind you of specific experiences in your life? How familiar or comfortable are you with it? If it is new to you, does it connect with your experience?
 - How do you respond to the scripture? Do you wonder about the biblical story and its relationship to other passages—about the stories or teachings that surround it, reflect it, or resist it? If you could speak to the original author(s) of this text, what question would you like to ask?
 - » Pause for a brief moment of silence to give space for reflection.
 - » Invite someone to share a brief response, then go around the room to hear from the rest of the group. Participants can pass, but return to them at the end of this section to see if they wish to speak.
- **Read the response piece.**
 - » The contributions in *Unsettling the Word* are fairly short. Go around the group reading the text aloud.
 - » Either begin with a general go-around of impressions or go directly into the questions for the specific passage.
 - » As you draw near to the time set for closing, do a final go-around of impressions or last thoughts.

- **Close.**
 - » Find a way to close the session that is appropriate for the group. You can
 - offer a concluding prayer
 - re-read the epigraph
 - hold silence for a minute
 - » Thank everyone for participating, and remind the group of the next session and the recommended reading.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY: A SUGGESTED OUTLINE

- **Pray.**
 - » In silence or aloud, offer greetings to the One who made you and to your relatives in Creation. Ask for wisdom and connection to flow through your study.
- **Ask yourself questions.**
 - » Write a few words for each of these prompts. Aim to notice with curiosity, rather than self-judgment.
 - » Physical: How am I feeling in my body today? Do I have any needs at this time?
 - » Mental: What is occupying my thoughts at the moment?
 - » Spiritual: What spirit am I in—which people, places, and ideas am I drawn to, or distant from? How is my relationship with the Divine?
 - » Emotional: Which emotional states are present with me? Has something recently affected my emotions?
- **Read the scripture (out loud if possible).**
- **Read the response piece.**

- » Note any immediate thoughts, responses, or possible “rabbit trails” that could lead to additional reading.
 - » Read and respond to each question. If the question does not prompt you, skip it.
 - » Return to your earlier notes on your own state and the immediate responses you had. What are the places of tension or dissatisfaction? Where do you feel strengthened, affirmed, or fed?
- **Close.**
 - » Questions for self: perform a “check out” using the same prompts noted above.
 - » Pray. Give thanks for the skills and gifts of others, identify the responsibilities you will uphold today, name your needs, and offer thanks!

RETURN TO THE GOOD

Genesis 1:20–31, USTW pages 1–6

- What does your society tell you is the best way for an individual to lead their life? Which accomplishments are the most valuable? Are there conflicting messages on the values you should live by?
- “*Nothing feels better than to hear an elder remark on one’s action with [...] heremahetos (very good).*”

Do you recognize this sentiment? Are there other relationships with individuals or groups that offer the same satisfaction when you do a good job?

- Briggs-Cloud analyzes the etymology for the Maskoke term translated as “law,” showing that “law” means to be connected to the natural order through observation and imitation. What are your associations with “law” in your context? Where do laws come from, and how are they upheld? How do they relate to the natural world?
- The essay connects settler colonialism, industrial agriculture, and violence against women as the disruption of sacred gender roles. Why does colonialism impose gender roles on colonized peoples? How does the concept of “civilization” justify this practice?
- What are the obstacles that Maskoke society faces in returning to what is “good”? Do any of these obstacles inhibit your own life of goodness?
- “*It is time that we all reclaim our genesis. We must intimately interact with what is ‘good’ in order to effectively enact what is good.*”

What would decolonization look like for Settler/Christian people? What do they need to learn or re-learn? How can Settler/Christian communities ensure that Indigenous nations have the space and resources to “effectively enact what is good”?

GOODNESS TURNS

Genesis 6:5–8, 8: 6–12, 9:8–18, USTW pages 7–10

- The tree who speaks in this account intercedes between humanity and the divine. What implications does this have for humanity’s own relationship with Creation and the divine?
- When the tree speaks of honouring the wounds of humanity, how do you understand that claim?
- *“Punishment is the language of humans, I tell the Lord.”*

Do you agree? Where does punishment fit in the story of the Great Flood as you have heard it? What does it reveal about the character of God, and what other biblical stories affect that revelation?

- What does this re-telling of the Flood story say about humanity’s place in God’s created order? Does that clash or fit with other teachings?
- The sign that “Goodness turns from destruction” is the sign of a covenant. One way the larger story of Holy Scripture is told is as a series of covenants between God and humanity. What does this response piece add to that story?

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PETROPOLIS

Genesis 11:1–9, USTW pages 11–15

- The response piece suggests that the “one language” can be understood as a single, dominant “imperial language” and “deadly logic,” which uses powerful words and ideas to co-opt different people into the same power structure. How is this reflected in the biblical text as well as the response piece (set in contemporary Canada)?
- The story makes a brief reference to the positives in the Settler culture. Frequently, the Indigenous-Settler interaction is imagined as “all or nothing” where one culture is right and the other is wrong. Is it necessary to mention the positives in the Settler

culture in a piece that is otherwise critical throughout?

- Discuss the way that gender and sexual violence appear in the story, as ways of understanding the extractive/Settler activity. What parts of Christianity permit these forms of violence against the Earth and against women?
- There are six facts mentioned in “The Foolishness of Petropolis.” Which of these were you aware of? Which are most troubling? What does the response “God damn it” mean to you?
- Where is there hope in the response piece? What would God’s intervention look like in contemporary Canada (or your specific context)?

ECONOMIES OF ENOUGH

Exodus 16:1–31, USTW pages 27–29

- Do we live in a world of abundance or a world of scarcity? Comment on how your answer is affected by technology, education, land, human relations, or economic/social models.
- In the wilderness, the people liberated from Egypt were formed into a nation. Lansdowne refers to a quote from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, which links nationhood with both the Earth’s generosity and the responsibility to “*give up what we can to support the integrity of our homelands for future generations.*” How does your sense of national identity respond to these ideas?
- What is one thing our generation could give up in order to maximize life for future generations? Is it possible to make that sacrifice and still have “enough” for you and your family or community?
- Some followers of Jesus find evidence of God’s favour and blessing in material goods like wealth, houses, and cars. Others believe that followers of Jesus are called to embrace simple living or forms of poverty. How do these beliefs relate to the biblical text and the response?

IN THE SEVENTH ROUND OF THE 13 MOONS

Leviticus 25:1–28, USTW pages 30–32

- The idea of Sabbath rest or a Sabbatical period comes from this biblical passage. The response text emphasizes that rest is for all of Creation, not just humanity. Where do you see regular periods of rest in the other-than-human Creation?
- Keeping track of the passage of time is central to the practices laid out in these texts. What holidays/holy days do you observe? How does this observance affect your relationship with Creation, your neighbours, or God?
- The rules in Leviticus set up a system where land is never lost to a family or sold permanently, calling on people to redeem the land sold by poorer relatives, and instituting a general “reset” in the year of Jubilee. How does Rarihokwats interpret this? How would a restoration of land rights every 50 years affect the future generations?
- The response text includes the instruction to “*Make this Jubilee Year a time to avoid taking advantage of others.*” What everyday practices do you consider to be “taking advantage of others”?
- How do the two texts present the relationship with neighbours? Where do you see these relationships in your own life?

NOT YOUR PROMISED LAND

Leviticus 25:13–55, USTW pages 33–35

- The biblical story of Exodus liberation (leaving slavery in Egypt and going to the Promised Land) is often divorced from the “Eisodus” conquest (capturing, destroying, and scattering the cities and peoples living in Canaan). What stories have been ignored in the telling of Canada’s (or your particular nation’s) history?
- The reflection piece notes that the Jubilee rules for land restoration and redemption have no reference to the original inhabitants,

referring to the land after the Israelite conquest. These are rules for how one community shares land internally, not directions for returning land that one community stole or appropriated from another. Is it possible for people living on stolen land today to draw guidance from the Jubilee?

- The idea that land is property that can be traded and held perpetually is central to the dominant economic system of North America. Under the imported European legal system, the landmass of Canada seems to be a contiguous whole, but in reality is made up of a patchwork of treaties, lands without treaties, areas of extinguished title, and lands for which treaties were never signed or are being retroactively negotiated. How does the European model of “land owned once and for all” clash with the Jubilee view of land? What is the role of ongoing relationship in each model?
- What is Shantz’s final prayer for liberation referencing? What do Settlers need to be liberated from? Is it possible to develop a new concept of land while occupying it?

SCOUTING THE HALDIMAND TRACT

Numbers 13:1–3, 16–33, USTW pages 36–38

Background info: Following the U.S. Revolutionary War, the 1784 Haldimand Proclamation secured in colonial law the land six miles either side of the Grand River for the use of the Mohawks and allied nations. As military allies of the Crown, the Six Nations (Haudenosaunee) were being compensated for loss of lands in what became the United States. While the Haldimand Tract is sometimes used to show that Indigenous nations are also “Settlers,” the Six Nations were present on these lands long before; the Haldimand Tract was intended to be a permanent home. Large parts of the Tract were never transferred, other parts were leased or sold by the Indian Agent with the money either held in trust or misappropriated, and currently the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve holds about 4.9 percent of the original land grant.

- In “Scouting the Haldimand Tract,” the decision-making of the

nation is structured with several layers and the involvement of many groups. What processes for making decisions are evident in the biblical text? How do they compare with governmental functions you are aware of?

- Are you aware of the international agreements and treaties that determined the ownership of the land you are on? When was the last time that the land changed hands (between respective nations), and under what circumstances?
- In the biblical account, the fearful report of the majority of the spies in Canaan leads to a crisis where the people want to turn back to Egypt. In this retelling, what are the fears that the Haudenosaunee have? What are the ways that Indigenous nations can assert their rights to the lands occupied by Settlers?
- The story of the spies in Canaan is sometimes taught in churches as a lesson to trust in God’s provision rather than in human fears. In the retelling, the scouts have found the legal deeds and the evidence that the land belongs to them. Do you have faith in treaties, legal documentation, and agreements made by former generations? Why or why not?
- The report of the scouts includes their assessment of the Settlers—“*Their eyes only look at screens and their ears only listen through cords; they will not see or hear us.*” What are the factors that make it hard for Settlers to hear the rights of Indigenous nations? How can Settlers work to see and hear the truth?

THE BOUNDARIES AND LIMITS OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

Numbers 34:1–15, USTW pages 39–44

Background info: Settler colonialism refers to a specific form of colonization, which installs a society of Settlers to displace or replace the original population of the territory. It is distinct from types of colonialism that are solely focused around resource extraction. Settler colonialism relies upon an external (imperial) power, a myth of

superiority/inferiority, and a range of methods to suppress or remove the existing Indigenous political systems.

- When you describe the place where you live to a person in another country, what do you mention? What landscapes or histories do you describe?
- Settler colonialism uses stories of progress and civilization, manifest destiny, and visions that stretch across land masses like “from coast to coast to coast” or “from sea to shining sea.” How do these stories interact with Indigenous identity? How does Christianity inform or resist these narratives?
- The three biblical paraphrases compare the European colonization of North America, Nazi occupation of Europe, and the Zionist project in Palestine with the biblical account from Numbers. Where do you see a sense of divine mandate or justification? Which of these paraphrases is the most troubling?
- Pitkänen’s response piece refers to decolonization struggles of the past, and asks what ways of living together make decolonization without violence possible. What are the features of settler colonialism that would need to be overcome to change the relationship?
- One response to this list of conquests is to say that violence, theft of land, and warfare are human nature and have always been part of human history. *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* speaks against these past and present impacts of settler colonialism inflicted on Indigenous nations around the globe. How does The Declaration (see goo.gl/Jv76T4) offer another vision of human nature?

THE 15 COMMANDMENTS

Deuteronomy 5:1–22, USTW pages 45–50

- Identify a community that you are familiar with, or discuss the group you are studying with: What are some of the laws,

commandments, or agreements that members in your circle agree to? Where did they come from and how were they agreed upon?

- As part of the Creation Community, the covenant that Musa Dube sets forth is being made with you. Are there parts that you disagree with or would like to change?
- When you read the original Ten Commandments, do you think they relate to every human on earth? Are they universal laws? And what about non-human life? How do these laws relate to our fellow creatures?
- Several of the 15 Commandments are expansions on the originals. For example, “do not steal” and “do not murder” receive extensive commentary to relate these words to “*the post-colonial era, [...] the neo-liberal era, and the eras of global warming and climate change.*” Do you think that these updates are a departure from the original intention?
- Commandments 11–15 are new additions, but they reflect many themes found elsewhere in scripture, and address crimes like slavery and exploitation of the Earth that Christians have often committed. Do these additional commandments clash with other commandments or pieces of biblical literature? Do you think that European Christians could have still committed such large-scale atrocities, like the transatlantic slave trade, if these 15 Commandments had been in place?
- Each commandment addresses a specific category of behaviour. None of them are complete alone. What commandment would you add in order to support decolonization in your context?

DESTROY EVERYTHING

Deuteronomy 7:1–26, USTW pages 51–55

- Does Jensen’s representation of God reflect the idea of God that you are familiar with? If this was indeed a commandment from the Creator of the Universe, would you be justified in obeying it?

- Several times the response piece includes a side comment in brackets that suggests these commandments actually come from humanity and are merely (perhaps duplicitously) ascribed to God. This is one response to the violence of scripture. Is it a response that you are comfortable with?
- What are some of the words and terms that the response text offers to use alongside “God”? Does understanding “God” to mean “Settler Society” or “Civilization” affect the way you read this text? How has “God” been defined for you, and what are the differences in the way God is defined for Indigenous communities?
- How would someone without any investment in the Bible or the Christian tradition read the original biblical text? Would there be redeeming factors for them that are not present in the response text?
- What promises are made in these texts? What promises are made to participants in settler colonial societies?
- The absolute violence that the response text describes is a representation of the impact of imperialism, colonialism, and White/Settler/Christian supremacy. *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (see goo.gl/Jv76T4) is also a representation of this impact, identifying the specific evils that Settler societies inflict on Indigenous nations through naming the recompense needed to reverse these impacts. Would it be wise for Settler Christians to hold The Declaration in one hand and the Bible in the other? How does accepting The Declaration affect the way we “hold” scripture?

TO THE PRESENT DAY

Joshua 6:1–25, USTW pages 56–58

- The Puritans saw a clear precedent for murder and land theft in the book of Joshua, with them in the role of the God-ordained heroes. Where have you experienced present-day religious people understanding their actions in the reflection of their sacred stories?

- What aspects of Christianity supported the colonists' vision of "*the Settlers as an invincible force propelled by a transcendent destiny, blessed by God to clear the land*"? What aspects of Christianity resist this?
- God commanded the eradication of the Canaanite nations. There is a comparable belief among some Settler communities, and in the nature of settler colonialism itself, that Indigenous nations must "disappear," either through disease and destruction of food sources, warfare/slavery, direct murder, displacement/exile, or assimilation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada used the term "cultural genocide" to describe the Residential School system. Do you think of your nation as a site of genocidal violence? How does "cultural" genocide differ from other forms of genocide?
- If Settlers had visions of the New World drawn from the conquest narratives in the Bible, what visions did Indigenous peoples have? How could Settlers learn these ideas and take them seriously? If you are a part of a Settler community (a church, school, municipality, etc), what expectations do local Indigenous people(s) have of your group?
- The survival of Rahab and her family is linked to the ongoing presence of Indigenous nations within Settler states like Canada, Australia, and Israel, despite the intention of their dispossession and assimilation. The refusal of Indigenous nations to assimilate into Settler society persists as evidence that there are other ways of life and other worldviews than that of the settler colonial nation. What are some ways ongoing Indigenous presence is evident in your community or nation? Which ways are considered "appropriate" and which upset or provoke?

HEROES SAVE LIVES

Judges 16:1–30, USTW pages 59–61

- In the biblical account of Samson, the ethnicity of Delilah is never made clear. In the retelling, there is a clear relationship between the woman and the communities affected. How does this influence your judgment of her actions?

- Samson’s story is part of the Book of Judges, and Samson is described as one of these Judges, the line of Israel’s leaders before the monarchy. What larger narrative gives meaning to this story of violence and conflict? What “title” might the white community give to the man in this story?
- In the story of Samson’s birth in Judges 13, an angel claims that Samson will take the lead in delivering the nation from its enemies. Samson’s life is punctuated with the slaughter of the Philistines, and his death toll (even in his own death) seems to be his sole accomplishment as a Judge. Yet all this loss of life is not part of a campaign of national liberation. The retelling states that “heroes save lives.” What sorts of heroes exist in times of colonial oppression? Is the woman in the retelling a hero?
- What is happening at the end of the story when the neighbour asks, “*Would you do anything differently?*” As we consider the truth of colonial violence and the legacy of personal and collective acts of evil, where do you hear this question being asked, and where do you look for answers?

WHAT ABOUT ORPAH?

Ruth 1:1–18, USTW pages 62–64

- What are the factors that Orpah and Ruth consider in making their decision according to Ketchum’s account? What are the deciding factors, and what factors would you include in this sort of decision?
- The date and location of the response piece is very specific. What knowledge of the background do you have that offers insight into the text?
- Many millions of people today are unable to return to their places of origin. Significant portions of the Bible tell the story of a people separated from their land. What stories and experiences of exile exist in your ancestry? What are the forces at work today that prevent return?

- Many Indigenous communities today suffer from poverty, social disruption and lack of opportunities. For some, the opportunity to get education or work means leaving their community. How does this dynamic reflect the Indian Residential School System? In making this difficult choice, what are the losses to the individuals and their community?

GIVE US A KING

1 Samuel 8:1–22, USTW pages 65–69

- The biblical text deals with the people’s desire for a king despite the clearly stated disadvantages. In choosing a king, they rejected God’s kingship. How does participation in the political system affect relationship with the divine? How are Indigenous people expected to participate in Settler politics?
- *“Crying out for a king is not/merely poor seeing, /it’s not even closed eyes. /It’s like forgetting one has eyes at all.”*

What kinds of “eyes” or “vision” is Zantingh talking about here? Why would those who are bereft of “eyes” cry out for a king?

- *“You are a fragile clay jar.”*

Is this true? Does engaging in conversations around decolonization and the scriptures threaten to shatter or erode parts of your identity? Are there parts of you that are “fired” and strengthened by these conversations? Why, or why not?

- How does the poet describe the place of prayer in responding to fear, lack of vision, and desire for control? Does this fit with your experiences of prayer?
- What are the images of “true power” and “unity” in the poem? Does this resonate with the concepts of God’s kingship that the Church demonstrates? Where is there hope for improving Indigenous-Settler relationships in these concepts?

THEY WERE ALL CAPTIVE

Esther 8:3–8, 11–17, USTW pages 95–97

- This response to scripture is in the voice of Vashti, commenting on Esther’s story—two of the comparatively few named women in scripture. What insights does Vashti have because of her position as a woman, a former queen, and a person with a voice?
- The story of Esther is about a vulnerable community in the heart of an empire. Where do you see connections with the themes of imperialism and colonialism, and the survival of Indigenous communities in North America?
- Vashti asks:
“Is anyone safe/when the master’s own tools/are used to dismantle the master’s house?”

What is she referencing here? Are there different ways to view the resolution of the story of Esther?

- Mordecai is described as donning crown and royal robes, and wielding the king’s authority. How has he adopted the royal methods? What role does revenge play in this?
- Travis’s response piece ends with, *“You too were born for such a time as this;”* a re-framing of Mordecai’s challenge to Esther. What challenge do you take from this piece?

YOU ALONE LISTENED

Psalm 147, USTW pages 114–118

Ransom is reflecting on the Psalm and responding through her experiences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings.

Unless your group is generally familiar with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provide this brief sketch, elaborating as appropriate with information specific to your community (i.e. schools that your Church denomination ran, the year of any apologies, etc).

The TRC: A central colonizing process in Canada was the Indian Residential School system, which removed Indigenous children from the care and nurture of their parents and placed them in church-run boarding schools for most or all of the year. As a rule, children were forbidden from speaking their Indigenous language(s) and expected to become Christians. Conditions were generally bad, with high rates of death, illness, malnutrition and abuse of all kinds. The school system operated for most of Canada’s history and was part of a broader assault on Indigenous existence. Generally, the schools were justified on the basis that they brought as bringing Christian civilization to previously uncivilized peoples. Between 2010 and 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission collected statements from survivors about their experiences, especially the abuses they suffered, and the impacts that this has had on their lives and families. The final report named the Indian Residential School system as a genocidal project of colonialism.

- Does anyone in the circle have personal experience with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? Have any read its work or been made aware of its conclusions (see www.nctr.ca)?
- Ransom contrasts the tears and the horrific accounts with the goodness of prayer, medicines, and the work (see www.nctr.ca) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission collecting the “*heart-shaped stories of survivors*,” especially those who make their statements in private. Why might some people choose to make a private statement?
- Psalm 147 praises God’s power and presence on the Earth. How is God’s power and presence identified in the response to the psalm?
- The motto of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was “For the child taken, for the parent left behind.” In the response to the psalm, God is portrayed as the one who listens, even when no one else does. Where have you had experience of listening as a holy privilege?

LAMENT ON COAST SALISH LAND

Jeremiah 20:7–18, USTW pages 133–138

- Part II begins with questions asked of the Creator, ending with “*How do we partake in our portion of rage?*” What is your “portion of rage?” Why might your answer differ significantly from the answers of others? If you identify as non-Indigenous, how can you be prepared to hear and validate the “portion of rage” of Indigenous individuals and communities?
- The deaths of Tina Fontaine and Colton Boushie are mentioned specifically. Are these names familiar to you? Why does “the grief of their death” connect with the context of the poem, and what is the significance of naming/remembering the dead?
- “*This is the way of all prophets. They speak in languages that the powerful do not want to hear, sing songs that unsettle, take up space that Canada has taken away.*”

A “prophet” is understood differently in varying contexts. How do you use the word? Where do you see it in this text, and where do you see the work of a “prophet” in your own context?

- Jeremiah is known as “the Weeping Prophet” because his task turned most of his people against him. He was ignored, disbelieved, chastised, accused of being a liar, and eventually dies in exile in Egypt. Yet the book of Jeremiah contains promises of healing, a return to the land, and God’s judgment on the oppressors. Can you find hope in this piece? How do hope and weeping co-exist?
- Chuang writes about her identity as a “*diasporic Christian Settler who has lost the names of my own ancestors.*” What are the sacrifices in identity expected of Settlers, especially Settlers from the global majority (non-White)? How does this loss of identity function within settler colonialism?

RESISTING THE GREAT CO-MISSION

Matthew 28:16–20, USTW pages 183–188

- Smith uses the term “co-mission” to emphasize the two core elements of imperialism as experienced in Turtle Island—Church and Crown. How have you experienced the Church cooperating with the State? How have you seen the Church resisting or disassociating from the State?
- Christianity has been many different things to many different people. One broad feature of Christian thought and practice has been the “spreading of the Gospel.” What are the stories of how Christianity was introduced to your community, ancestors, or culture? How are the individuals who brought Christianity portrayed?
- Discuss the concept of “good news,” acknowledging that Christianity has been part of power structures that have caused great harm. What is the “good news” that Christians today should be sharing in response to this harm?
- *“Most non-whites resisted and continue to resist the dominant reading of Matthew 28 that understands the white man as ‘ye’ and all others as the nations to whom ‘ye’ was/are sent. They resisted in the 1700s and they resist today. Some have rejected the gospel of the white man and his Bible outright. Others reinterpret the Bible in ways that reflect their God-experience and God-knowledge. Some have decided that ordaining Matthew 28:16–20 as the great commission doesn’t reflect the crux of the gospel.”*

Which of these different strategies for responding to Christianity do you feel closest too? Which are most difficult to adopt or to identify with?

- The response piece ends on a call for self-love. Where does self-love fit into your experience of Christianity? When people who have been denied respect, self-determination, and agency by the joint Christian-imperial alliance assert their dignity and rights, it is an act of self-love that can be profoundly challenging to settler colonial society. Where have you experienced this?

AN URGENT LETTER

Luke 1:26–56, USTW pages 203–206

- What words describe the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth? What are relationships in your life that bear all or some of these characteristics?
- The letter refers to the history of role models and how sharing that history has been part of the relationship between the two women, connecting their present to the example of strong women in the past. Have you seen this sort of history in your own culture? What role do stories of ancestors play in the struggle for decolonization?
- What are the dreams that Mary shares with Elizabeth? How might they be connected with her pregnancy? What dreams do you share with your community?
- Why does Mary write to Elizabeth? What are her fears and concerns? What might Elizabeth be thinking and feeling as she reads the letter?
- Mary ends her letter with specific questions. If a woman in her situation wrote to you, what advice would you give? What assistance would you offer? What would you need in order to be able to help?

DANCING WITH GOD

Philippians 2:1–11, USTW pages 242–245

- The poem begins “*The people needed a Saviour.*” The image of Jesus as Saviour is a powerful part of Christian religion, but the question “what does Jesus save from?” has many answers, both different and connected. When it comes to questions of colonization and decolonization, what does “salvation” mean? How has the idea of white/Christian people as “saviours” supported imperialism?
- Have you seen Indigenous practices offered as part of Christian worship? What happened and how was it described or explained?

Are you aware of sacraments, holy days, or rituals that have been developed or adopted into Christianity? Are any controversial or misunderstood?

- What are the potential dangers of adopting customs and practices from a different distinct culture or religion? What are the possible positives?
- How do you relate to the statement: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Php 2:5)? Do you ever see people who seem to be imitating Christ without being part of the Church? Do professed Christians find support or challenge from Church institutions as they try to be like Jesus?
- How does the description of the Sun Dance help you to understand the figure of Jesus and the story of the Incarnation and Crucifixion? Are there other examples outside of scripture that you draw upon to explain or describe that story?
- In the past, Indigenous spiritual practices were not simply considered incompatible with Christianity, but were made illegal and persecuted under Settler law. Why were these practices outlawed? What other outcomes can you imagine, and what would need to be different?

TOTALIZING

Titus 1:5–6, USTW pages 249–253

- The author describes how one person can criticize another community by quoting a member of that community. How does this rhetorical act affect the way this criticism is heard? How might another member of the community being criticized respond?
- When have you been included in a broad, totalizing statement? Were you able to make a response?
- What responsibility does a person have to explain, excuse, or otherwise respond to other’s perceptions of the community that they come from?

- “For settler colonizers, just walking along, plugging stuff in, and drinking the water is racist, no matter if we Settlers say mean things or not.”

When totalizing language is used in the analysis of power structures and oppression, when and to whom is it a helpful form of communication, and when is it unhelpful?

- The writer speaks of some absolutes that are very helpful, including the principles articulated in documents like the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. What absolutes help you direct your life towards goodness? Which absolutes are incompatible with decolonization?

LET US IMAGINE

Philemon 1:8–21, USTW pages 254–258

- Onesimus is described as a “slave” but we might more fully describe him as a “person who has been enslaved,” or as in the response text, “an enslaved Yoruba man.” What is your definition of slavery (both past and present)? How do people become “enslaved?”
- In the biblical text, we learn that Philemon is a Christian and that Onesimus has also become a Christian. How do people become Christian, and what role do power and authority play in conversion? What is different about the baptism of Onesimus and the other enslaved Yoruba people in the response text?
- The book of Philemon has been used to support the argument that slavery is not against God’s law, or that Christians should not concern themselves with the abolition of the slave trade. Others have interpreted the letter as Paul’s message to Philemon to do the right thing and release Onesimus to freedom, placing the onus on the slave-owner. What do you think the original intent was of this letter?
- Paul writes that Onesimus and Philemon are “dear brothers.” Many religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions emphasize that

humans are all part of one family, that we are all relatives, or that we are all the same. How does this belief address the significant differences in material conditions and prospects between any two groups, such as Indigenous and Settler communities in North America?

- De La Torre ends his piece with a stark question: “*If you are Onesimus, what would you do?*” What is your answer?

O CEDAR TREE, CLAP YOUR HANDS

Revelation 18:1–20, 19:1–8, USTW pages 273–276

- The response piece begins by remembering the abundance of the territory and the exploitation by the early white Settlers. Where else is “abundance” to be found in this piece? Who benefits from abundance and how is it maintained?
- When you consider the land you reside upon, do you have a sense of natural and artificial areas? Which areas nurture life, and which areas threaten or limit life? Where do you find sustenance, rest, and connection with the non-human creation?
- When you read the vision of the response piece, how does it compare to the text in Revelation? Which text do you consider more convincing or useful in creating change (or combating climate change)?
- Revelation condemns kings and merchants, and Babylon—a metaphorical city or system of oppression, violence, extraction, and greed. Where do you hear voices of condemnation today? Do you consider these voices to be credible when they prophesy disaster?
- If God called you to come out of Babylon, what would that mean for you, a creature of earth and God’s Spirit? Would that be an occasion for lament, joy, or other responses?



Illustration for "O Cedar Trees, Clap Your Hands" by Jonathan Dyck.