



A Mari usque ad Mare – From Sea to Sea

KINDNESS, RECONCILIATION, BEAUTY, AND NEIGHBOURS

Keynote Address for the Inauguration of the **Canadian Mar Thoma Regional Committee**

PRESENTED BY
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A MARI USQUE AD MARE – FROM SEA TO SEA

KINDNESS

Thank you for your kind invitation to offer the keynote address here today. It is the same kindness I remember when I visited a Mar Thoma church in India many years ago, the same kindness I see emanating from Bishop Isaac, and the same kindness I feel when working with your representatives at the tables of The Canadian Council of Churches.

Thank you for your kindness.

A MARI USQUE AD MARE - FROM SEA TO SEA

Who knows Canada's motto? Your motto is "Lighted to Lighten".

Likewise, Canada's motto is "From Sea to Sea". This phrase actually comes from Psalm 72, which prays for guidance and support for King Solomon over his land and peoples.

PSALM 72

A Prayer for Guidance and Support for the King of Solomon

- ¹ Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.*
- ² May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.*
- ³ May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.*
- ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.*
- ⁵ May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.*
- ⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.*
- ⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.*
- ⁸ May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
- ⁹ May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.*
- ¹⁰ May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.*
- ¹¹ May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.*

12 For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

13 He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually, and blessings invoked for him all day long.

16 May there be abundance of grain in the land; may it wave on the tops of the mountains; may its fruit be like Lebanon; and may people blossom in the cities like the grass of the field.

17 May his name endure forever, his fame continue as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed in him; may they pronounce him happy.

18 Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

19 Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

20 The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

CANADA'S MOTTO: "FROM SEA TO SEA"

As mentioned above, the motto of Canada is derived from verse 8 of this Psalm:

8 May he [the king] have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

The commentaries tell us that originally, the seas referred to here were the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea; today, the land between these two bodies of water roughly encompasses the country of Israel.

Canada began using the phrase "from sea to sea" in the nineteenth century, when the concept of "Dominion" described the country of Canada. At that time, it was an aspirational statement—a vision that the colonial powers, French and English, would endeavor to assert colonial rule from sea to sea.

I find that the motto neatly encapsulates the irony and the inherent contradictions of Christianity in this country today. On the one hand, who could not fail to be thrilled by the description of peace and prosperity, of care for the needy and the oppressed, that David sings and prays for?

2 May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

On the other hand, the vision of dominion has not always been kind to those on the margins. The next verses echo language we often hear spoken by Indigenous Peoples in Canada:

5 May he [the king] live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

6 May he [the king] be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

7 In his [the king's] days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

Treaties, covenants, and agreements made with Indigenous Peoples sometimes used the phrase, “as long as the grass grows or the waters run.” Can you hear the echo of that sentiment in these verses of the Psalm?

RECONCILIATION

It is precisely this tension between dominion and abundant peace that led to genocide in certain areas of this country, and to cultural genocide in relatively recent times. The Indigenous Peoples of Newfoundland were hunted and exterminated. The Indigenous Peoples in the rest of Canada were subjected to the Indian residential school system, which the Supreme Court Justice of Canada has recently described as cultural genocide.

Sadly, and with much regret, many of Canada’s churches are complicit in this legacy inasmuch as they managed the residential schools on behalf of the government, whose express policy was “to kill the Indian in the child”.

The legacy of this contradiction lives on in the news of current events; of particular relevance are the Wet’suwet’en protests and pipelines. Reconciliation will continue to be Canada’s biggest challenge in the coming years. May the Mar Thoma community be aware of that river of history you are stepping into, and may you, together with faithful people everywhere, work so that righteousness flourishes and peace abounds, until the moon is no more; as long as the grass grows and the water runs. May we ever together, also through The Canadian Council of Churches, work for reconciliation and peace.

BEAUTY

The other striking image that surfaces in both Psalm 72 and Canada’s motto is beauty. We inhabit a beautiful country that stretches from sea to sea to sea. Recent suggestions have

been made to change Canada's motto to encompass the imagery not only of the Atlantic-to-Pacific Oceans, but also that of the Arctic Ocean—from coast to coast to coast. As stewards of the lands and resources that lie in our country, we are confronted on the one hand by the wealth and beauty Canada's landscape provides—evidence of God's creative power, of the wonder and mystery of Creation that points to the mercy, justice, and power of God's intricate care, woven and glittering into a harmonious web of beauty. On the other hand, global average temperatures in the Arctic have already risen by 5 degrees. The lifestyles, traditional practices and knowledge, the intimate, centuries-long relationship between the people and the land is melting. In Western Canada, many see the longer and more intense fire season as evidence of climate change. And nearly everywhere, indications of a widespread environmental shift are clear to those who have eyes to see. As caretakers, people created in the image of God to live in harmony with creation, we bear a collective responsibility to learn anew what it means to love our neighbour, both in the human and non-human aspects of creation. May we together, also through The Canadian Council of Churches, be on that journey.

NEIGHBOURS

Our neighbours come from every corner on Earth and have lived here intimately with the land for 10,000 years. Stouffville, where we have gathered today, was more recently settled by European and American Christian communities committed to peace, an interesting history with repercussions that still inform the politics of this town today.

Many early settlers of Whitchurch-Stouffville were members of the historic peace churches: Brethren in Christ, Mennonites, and Quakers. They were attracted to settle Upper Canada by Lt. Governor John Graves Simcoe with the offer of military exemption in 1793. The peace teachings of the Christian tradition deeply shaped their faith and caused them to wrestle with what it means to be people of God's peace, especially during times of conflict and war. As pioneers of conscientious objection in Canada, their commitment to the work of peace and reconciliation continues to serve as a witness in this community and around the world.

Stouffville is also the traditional territory of the Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississauga of Scugog, Hiawatha, and Alderville First Nations and the Métis Nation. It will be important to get to know these peoples, and to pick up the peace treaty that still governs this territory: the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

We also know and see that new Canadians come from all over. I come from a family who moved from the Netherlands in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to the United

States. I became a Canadian citizen just two years ago after living here now for nearly 25 years. What a blessing this country, its government, and its peoples have been to me. May we together, and also through The Canadian Council of Churches, double down on our commitment to peace, order, and good government, as well as to humility in our relationships with both our neighbours who have come from afar and who have lived here for 10,000 years, that we may love our neighbours even as God loves us.

THE CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

In The Canadian Council of Churches—which brings together 26 denominations from across Canada (whose members represent 85% of the Christians in our country) and through which I am so pleased and proud to work alongside you, the Mar Thoma Church—we together agreed on *Principles of Peace*, a document that begins to describe what we mean when we say that peace is at the heart of ecumenism. The last principle describes Shalom, a holistic vision of peace echoed throughout Scripture, including in Psalm 72:

Peace is a dynamic state of well-being and harmony—right relationships among people and nature where there is no fear. Nothing and no one is excluded from God's vision of peace; it includes all nations, cultures, and peoples, the whole inhabited Earth, indeed the whole cosmos. The quest for peace is at the heart of ecumenism and the shared path of reconciliation, of walking one another home.

We look forward to walking alongside you in all your activities as the Canadian Mar Thoma Regional Committee (CMRC) that is animating the Mar Thoma faith in Canada and abroad by developing and supporting appropriate charitable activities, facilitating Christian witness and outreach programs, and undertaking faith formation, education, and communication activities.

May we together, indeed, be walking one another home.



Peter Noteboom,
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The Canadian Council of Churches

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