

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST September 4, 2022

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus continues to stop at the homes of those who provide leadership in worshipping communities. Jesus continues to heal on the Sabbath, inspiring awe in some and disgust in others. On this journey, Jesus also teaches about gathering at a feast at the home of a very generous and inclusive host. Huge crowds follow Jesus from place to place, listening to him and watching what he does.

Read Luke 14:25-33. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

Jesus challenges the huge crowd who follow him on his journey to Jerusalem. **“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciple!” Luke 14: 25.** Jesus then uses two practical examples about the importance of completing a comprehensive inventory and assessment in preparation for moving forward with a vision. Jesus concludes this teaching with a further challenge. **“So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions!” Luke 14:33.** This is a difficult teaching to hear and there are few people to watch who put this teaching into practice.

Reread Luke 14:25-33. What is God saying to us in this gospel reading?

The English word at the centre of this teaching is the word “hate”. We are left to puzzle about what Jesus means in this teaching.

Our mother and father give us life. Two particular parts collide and fuse together in the formation of a single cell. After this single cell attaches in the womb, our mothers provide us with all the nutrients as this one cell multiplies and a new being in creation grows taking on characteristics of various body parts, each with different functions and capabilities. In the womb, we are surrounded by waters which cushion our developing bodies and protect us. In the womb, each of us hears the comforting sound of our mother’s heartbeat. We also hear the voices of those closest to our mother and the music which surrounds her. It is beneficial if the father, grandparents, extended family members, and friends of the expectant couple talk and sing to the infant being formed in the womb. When an expectant mother is filled with awe and wonder about this new life growing inside her, these feelings are also experienced by this new being. At the time of birth, it is also beneficial for the father, grandparents, extended family members, and friends to pick up the responsibilities of protecting and nurturing this new child brought into the wonders and mysteries of this creation.

For Indigenous Peoples, a sacred pipe is constructed of two materials. The bowl comes from the rock of Mother Earth and is carved to contain the sacred medicines. A small opening is bored through this sacred stone. The pipestem is often made with various woods with intricate scrollwork carved into its length. The Anishinaabe People often use birch and other woods growing nearby. Pipe Carriers teach that each part is unique and that together each part works in balance. Each part is equally important. Each part is as sacred as the other part. In his book **FOR JOSHUA: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son (originally published in 2003 by more recently published by Penguin Random House Canada, 2018)**, Richard Wagamese recounts a profound learning shared by a Healer in his journey in dealing with his estrangement from his son caused by an alcohol addiction. Richard Wagamese listened and learned, **“The pipe reminds us of its first teaching---that we are all equals, that we were all created exactly the same. We all carry the same gifts within us. We all have the same hungers. We all have the same joys. The pipe reminds us of that.”** As a result, the first of many teachings of the sacred pipe is that when there is equality and balance, there is no struggle, no confusion, no judgment, only harmony. In this teaching, the Healer went on to identify spirituality as the means to live so that Human Beings can discern the presence of Creator in every part of creation, including among the diversity of Human Beings who inhabit Mother Earth and benefit from her gifts. Like the stone bowl of the sacred pipe, spirituality lasts forever like Creator/Gitchi Manidoo. Like the wooden pipestem, life is fragile. The materials from which the pipestem is made will return to Mother Earth at some point in time. For the Healer, each of the parts of the sacred pipe are

unwrapped through songs of faith and ancient prayers in ceremony. Each of the parts are smudged with sweet grass, tobacco, and sage so that each part is clean, purified, and free of any obstruction which might block any prayers or petitions communicated to Creator/Gitchi Manidoo. Then the stone bowl and the wooden pipestem are joined together during a solemn moment of the unity of spirituality and life.

For Indigenous Peoples, Human Beings discover who we are through our relationship and ongoing communications with Creator/Great Spirit. Each Human Being has unique gifts and together we discover our particular strengths in relationships with all other Human Beings.

It is quite possible in this teaching of Jesus from the gospel reading for this day to be confused by the English verb “to hate” in pondering our relationships with Creator’s precious gifts given to us...our mother, our father, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

On August 15, 2022, a delegation from the Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund and Pimatisiwin Nipi began our journey to Pikangikum. The members of this delegation were the Executive Director from PWRDF Will Postma, Canon Martha Tataric from St. George’s Anglican Church in St. Catharines, the Reverend Ophelia Kamenawatamin from St. Peter’s Anglican Church in Bearskin Lake, and the Reverend David Franks from Trinity Anglican Church in Aurora and the Lutheran and Anglican Mission of the Bruce Peninsula. We were on our way to meet with the leadership of Pikangikum First Nation and with some of the people whose homes had been retrofitted so that they had access to safe, clean, and running water.

In Sioux Lookout, we stopped overnight and met two very interesting people. The Coordinator of the Sioux Lookout Area Aboriginal Management Board Mary Tait recounted how her grandparents took her out onto their traditional territories late into the summer whenever they heard an airplane circling overhead. As a result of this strategy, Mary Tait never attended a residential school. Being raised in the bush by her extended family members, she learned to speak the language of her Ancestors and how to live off the land and waters. She also told us how the twigs, leaves, and stones became her friends since all of the other children her age went to St. Anne’s Indian Residential School in Fort Albany. When the other children returned from residential school over the summer, she did not know how to speak English with these other children and they did not know how to speak with her. Although Mary Tait is the grandmother to 15 grandchildren, she pointed out that only 1 grandchild speaks Oji-Cree. SLAAMB provides training for young Indigenous adults to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work in a variety of jobs. SLAAMB trained young adults in Pikangikum to retrofit homes with safe, clean, and running water. Our delegation also met the Reverend Bill Morris who had served as a Deacon at St. Mary’s Anglican Church for many years and had been recently ordained a Priest. His family also attempted to keep him from attending residential school by sending him out onto the lands and waters of their traditional territories. At the age of seven when he was out in the bush hunting, he was curious when he heard an airplane overhead. In going to check out what was happening, he was gathered up and taken with other children in that airplane to Pelican Falls Indian Residential School. His family was not told about what happened to their son so they wondered if he had been lost while hunting. Bill Morris attended that residential school for ten years. Bill Morris recounted how he was physically beaten numerous times for speaking his language and suffered significant hearing loss when hit on the side of his head. As a broadcaster and producer for Watay Radio CKWT-FM, Bill Morris is also known as the “Voice of the North”. As part of the ministry team in Sioux Lookout, Bill Morris is also known for his creativity in gathering people together and in providing pastoral care for those who seek medical attention at the Meno Ya Win Health Centre in Sioux Lookout. The other major hospital was located in Thunder Bay.

When we arrived in Pikangikum, we met with the Deputy Chief Jonas Strang and members of the Band Council as well as with the Assistant Director of the Mental Health Hub and members of their Board of Directors. It was difficult making connections and building trust with these leaders. The Deputy Chief and Council pointed out that the Water Treatment Plant, the water distribution network, and current sewage lagoon needed to be upgraded to handle the increased usage

from a much larger population than had been in the community in 1992 when the Water Treatment Plant had been completed. Of the five standing water sources in the water distribution system, three of them were not providing safe and clean water. Two weeks prior to our arrival in Pikangikum, a search was begun for leaks in the water distribution system but the Water Treatment Plant Operator had not succeeded in locating the trouble spots so Pikangikum was under a boil water advisory. An expert from the nearby community of Red Lake had not arrived to join this search for these leaks. The Deputy Chief and Council also pointed out that water tanks and septic tanks installed by the Pikangikum Water Group were identified as having an eight year lifespan so in the homes retrofitted in Phases One and Two would soon need to be replaced. Another member of the Council asked why Pimatisiwin Nipi had only retrofitted 10 homes in each of the first two Phases and had another 16 homes underway in the current Phase. A member of the Mental Health Board of Directors noted that a recent power outage took some time to repair so vulnerable citizens needing dialysis were not able to have clean, safe, and running water in their homes as required by their respective medical teams. Some discussion took place about the need for a small hospital in Pikangikum, particularly since expectant mothers were sent to hospitals in Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay a few weeks prior to their delivery date and stayed for a period of time after giving birth. All of these leaders pointed out that the birth of children had risen to more than 100 per year and that the proportion of the population under 25 years of age had increased significantly over the past decade. The Director of Public Works explained that there were very few in the community who were plumbers, electricians, or carpenters. He explained the use of social media and walkie-talkies in getting water to homes in the community and in emptying septic tanks when these filled up. He noted that one of the five water and wastewater trucks was being repaired at Red Lake. A member of the community spoke to us about his dream to be able in the middle of the night to get a glass of water from his tap and then flush his toilet without worrying if he needed to call for a wastewater truck to empty his septic tank. Another member of the community who worked with youth in Eenchokay Birchstick School recounted that when the teenage girls came to her home for an overnight youth event, the other most favourite activity than making pizza was having a shower.

Our delegation also visited those whose homes had been retrofitted with an insulated water tank, a hot water heater, a water pump, an indoor toilet, and an insulated septic tank. The Chief and Council had chosen the Elders and most vulnerable in Pikangikum to have safe, clean, and running water in these homes. More citizens of Pikangikum were being identified by doctors who asked the Chief and Council to provide safe, clean, and running water as required by their ongoing medical treatments in their own homes. We were grateful that the Project Manager Raymond Suggashie and Ophelia Kamenawatamin spoke Ojibwe, connecting with those whom we met along the way and with those whom we were visiting. These people were grateful and appreciated that their extended family members living with them could also benefit from having safe, clean, and running water available to them. We learned that the shortage of plumbers in the community was problematic for them. We also noted that gravel was needed at many homes in order for water trucks and wastewater trucks to avoid getting stuck during times when the ground was wet. In visiting these homes scattered throughout Pikangikum, we noticed that some families had white picket fences near their homes honouring family members who had died. A few felt comfortable to share with us that they had lost some of their youth and young adults to suicide. Some homes had as many as five well-tended graves not far from their front doors.

During our visit, we encountered a great deal of pain communicated through anger and frustration. Some of this pain arose from grieving losses in their families and in their community. Some of this pain is rooted in decades of the policies and practices of assimilation, particularly in the underfunding and lack of adequate housing for their growing community. Some of this pain also came from the lack of clean, safe, and running water in the community.

Reread Luke 14:25-33. What is God calling us to be and do?

In his teaching, Jesus challenges those who trust in their own efforts to build towers and wage war on perceived enemies in order to protect their land and their wealth. Jesus hopes that Human Beings will use the same knowledge

and skills used in preparing to build a tower or to wage war in order to seek out eternal treasures and lasting peace. Jesus knows that some in the crowds who follow him will understand the good news of his message.

Let us give thanks for the gifts of Mother Earth created so that we and our descendants can live. Let us seek out the spiritual gifts which Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit provide daily for our nourishment and well-being. Let us walk the way of Jesus and carry the cross which we have been given to bear as Jesus has done, is doing, and will continue to do for all Human Beings.