

REFLECTION FOR THE 11TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST August 13 2023

After the death of John the Baptizer, Jesus takes to the water with those closest to him and lands on a shore where the crowds gather quickly and seek healing. At the end of the day, the disciples wonder how a crowd of more than 5000 men, women, and children will eat before they disperse and return to their homes. Jesus takes five loaves of bread and two small fish, raises these gifts of food to Creator/Great Spirit, gives thanks, breaks these meager amounts into smaller pieces, and has these tiny bits of nourishment distributed to all present. Afterwards, 12 baskets are filled with the leftovers.

READ MATTHEW 14:22-33. What catches your attention in this gospel reading?

After this feast, Jesus sends the crowds back to their homes and tells those closest to him to get into their boat and sail some distance out into the waters off the shore. Jesus wants to rest so he climbs up the mountainside. Jesus wants to have some time alone to talk to Source of all Life and Love during the night.

In these days of extreme and unpredictable climate events around the planet, Human Beings are learning much about the mechanics of these events. For hurricanes and monsoons, we know that around a centre of calm, raging winds move over the surface of waters in a circular manner picking up vast amounts of moisture while at the same time moving in a path which will eventually cross over land. Mighty winds, surging waters, and heavy rains cause considerable damage.

While Jesus prays, those closest to Jesus are out in a boat as the winds pick up and the waves grow larger, tossing their boat like a small piece of flotsam in the raging waters.

The Hebrew People have given us a Creation Story in which, at the very beginning, a mighty wind from Creator moves across the face of the deep before any of the stars or the earth herself comes into being. Those listening to this story identify these winds as the very presence of Creator in existence before all else is formed. Some maintain that Creator's presence continues to be present in this universe bringing new life into being.

Late into the night before the light from the morning sun begins to lighten the darkness, those closest to Jesus are surrounded by raging waters, sometimes seeing across the tops of the crests of waters moving towards them and looking in the downwind watching these swells move away from them off into the distance. Moments later, the disciples look up at walls of water towering over their heads on either side of their boat. Spray splashes them and water sloshes around their feet. The disciples are terrified, hanging onto whatever they can to keep them from being swept overboard and into the deep waters moving all around them.

What do these followers see out on these raging seas?

A human figure walks towards them on top of these waters.

What do these followers hear above the whistling winds gusting around their mast and through their rigging?

A voice with authority, saying **“TAKE COURAGE! IT IS ME! DO NOT BE AFRAID!” Matthew 14:27.**

What is the description of a person who emulates a particular **LEADER** or of the person who puts into practice all that a **TEACHER** instills into their mind and heart? That person is Simon Peter. It is not surprising that Simon Peter who witnessed Jesus heal the afflicted and feed a huge crowd wants to do exactly what Jesus is doing at that moment. It is not surprising that Simon Peter who seeks to apply the teachings of Jesus listens to what this remarkable man says to him. In his enthusiasm, Simon Peter steps out onto the roiling waters and begins to walk towards Jesus.

Simon Peter then looks around and sees the crests and deep valleys stretch out to the horizon in every direction. Simon Peter hears the howling winds. Simon Peter feels the spray drench his body. He begins to panic and sinks into the murky waters. Simon Peter shouts, **“Wisdomkeeper, save me!” Matthew 14:30.**

In reading this gospel story, I could hear Jesus chuckle as Simon Peter becomes overwhelmed in this new way of being and acting in a tumultuous world. Jesus stretches out his hand, grasps onto Simon Peter, and brings him into a peaceful calm at the centre of the universe.

Read Matthew 14: 22-33 a second time. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Simon Peter gets caught up in the circumstances in which he was living. We too can become ensnared by what is happening to our bodies as we age, the losses which we have experienced through physical afflictions and diminishing capabilities, the betrayal by others whom we have trusted, the deaths of friends and loved ones, changes at work, loss of income, increases in the costs of food and housing, memories of various forms of violence directed towards us, the impact of those who do not respect the integrity of individuals nor the sovereignty of nations in various place around the world....the list can go on and on...

The good news in this story of faith is simple. Simon Peter calls for help. Jesus stretches out his hand and grasps Simon Peter.

In this gospel passage, we recognize that Human Beings need to reach out to a generous and compassionate Being who wants to make us whole...who nourishes us with all that we need to live...who intends to bring us into a peace which passes all understanding with others...who saves us from a variety of adversities. When Jesus reaches out and grasps us firmly, you and I have opportunity to celebrate what the Source of All Life and Love is doing in our lives. After we are pulled into this centre of calm, then are able to move forward on our journey of faith in this tumultuous world.

Read Matthew 14:22-33 a third time. What is God asking us to be and do?

What does it mean for us as a community of faith to ask Jesus for help? Over the centuries, much has been written about salvation. As a part of the Anglican Church of Canada in communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, we are being challenged to expand our understanding of salvation. Somehow our teachings about salvation has been focused on the relationship between God and Human Beings, leaving out our relationships with Creator's creation and our responsibilities to care

for this universe. We find ourselves being called by the Source of All Life and Love to examine our relationship with Creator's creation. Now, we are recognizing that Creator/Great Spirit is at work bringing new life into existence and entrusting Human Beings with responsibilities to care for this universe in new ways.

One may start the day by stepping out onto the deck, looking around at the wonders of creation, and moving to the melodies produced by the rising sun, waters offshore, the leaves in the tree, the winged creatures in the woods, the stones warming in the morning sun, the plants rising out of the ground, and the very earth teeming with life. One may close the day by watching the sun set in an expanse of water undulating against the shoreline and the creeping colours of deep mauve in the eastern sky. The smell of woodsmoke fills the nostrils as gatherings of Human Being adjourn to talk about the day and share stories about what happened during the day and from times in the past. In the darkening skies, stars begin to emerge twinkling over both Human and more-than-human Beings. These experiences become opportunities for ceremonies, expressing gratitude for the many ways in which Creator/ Great Spirit has nourished and sustained us throughout the day.

Indigenous Peoples remind us that a host of Teachers were in existence for thousands and thousands and even millions of years before Human Being were created. In **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed, 2013)**, Robin Wall Kimmerer teaches about the wealth of Indigenous languages in communicating about the presence of Beings in living creatures on the land, in the air, and in the waters as well as in plants, grasses, plants, trees, soil, sand, rocks, and mountains. After meeting the nine remaining fluent Elders speaking together in a tipi at a Citizen Potawatomi Nation Pow Wow, Dr. Kimmerer invested a great deal of time and energy in learning to speak her Indigenous language. For Dr. Kimmerer, learning nouns in Bodewadmimwin allowed her to engage in conversations at a kindergarten level. She could give simple commands to her dog. However, her dog struggled to follow instructions in English so she wondered about the utility of training her dog to be bilingual. When Dr. Kimmerer received a package from a sister containing a host of words to attach to her refrigerator, she did not recognize these complex new words made from the stems of other words. Startled, Dr. Kimmerer began to realize that verbs rather than nouns made up 70% of her Indigenous language. Nouns are persons, places, or things. Action words describe a moving, living Being and their relationships in relation to a variety of other Beings created by Creator/Great Spirit. Verbs become descriptions of complex sets of interactions accomplishing a number of purposes in creation. Indigenous languages communicate a wealth of knowledge and wisdom which English cannot easily do.

It is not surprising that those coming to Turtle Island from European countries saw a vast expanse of land as objects to be owned and exploited for the benefit of themselves. Our theological language centred on owning the land and exercising dominion over the land and **its** inhabitants.

I believe that it is time to ask for help from Indigenous Peoples. For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples cared for Mother Earth, developing their cultural and spiritual practices to connect Peoples from coast to coast to coast with Creator/Great Spirit. In the stories from our Christian heritage, Jesus stretches out his arms on a cross to all Human Beings, grasping us, and pulling us into a life-transforming

relationship with a Triune God. As a result of the wholeness which we experience with the Source of All Life and Love, those who are saved are challenged to develop relationships with other Human Beings and live in peace with each other. Early on the first Easter morning, the Risen Jesus appears outside the empty tomb and greets Mary with affection. Later in the evening, the Risen Jesus meets those closest to him behind locked doors, breathes a breath of new life into their gathering and stretches out his arms so all can see how he suffered. The Risen Jesus invites Human Beings into a peace which passes all understanding. Indigenous Peoples challenge us to develop a language of salvation which includes all of the other more-than-human Beings who exist in the universe.

Let us cry out for help.

Let us accept all of the gifts of Creator/Great Spirit as living Beings to be respected as relatives, deserving our attention and care as persons.

Let us work together to ensure that the gifts of creation are available to teach our grandchildren's grandchildren.

Consider attending the Chippewas of Georgina Island Pow Wow 2023 on Saturday, September 23 or Sunday, September 24, beginning with Grand Entry ceremony at 12 noon at the Sutton District High School. Call the Reverend David Franks at 905-715-9997 to arrange rides.

Chief Donna Big Canoe extended an invitation to meet in the beginning of September 2023 to explore when she could come to visit and speak to us about her Indigenous community. Valerie Keith volunteered to accompany me. If anyone else would like to join us, let the Reverend David Franks know by email, calling me at 905-715-9997 or talking with me at church.

Consider reading **OUR HOME AND TREATY LAND: WALKING OUR CREATION STORY (Wood Lake Books, 2022)** by Raymond Adred and Matthew Anderson. Together, this Anglican priest and Lutheran pastor challenge non-Indigenous Settlers and Newcomers to connect with Indigenous Peoples to explore our shared heritage of the Treaties and agreements which bound us together in the past and guide us forward into the future. These theological professors challenge us to develop spiritual practices which draw Human Beings to care for the health and well-being of creation. Dr. Aldred brings his knowledge and wisdom from his Nehiyawak heritage as a member of Swan River Cree Nation in Alberta. Dr. Aldred teaches Indigenous Studies at the Vancouver School of Theology. Dr. Anderson brings his knowledge and wisdom being raised as a Settler from a farming family from the Cypress Hills part of Saskatchewan. Dr. Anderson teaches New Testament and Pilgrimage Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. Copies of this book are available through the Trinity Office Administrator Kelly Clarke at 905-727-6101 or through the Reverend Stephen Kern at St. Philip's-on-the-Hill at 905-477-1991. Talking Circles will begin on Thursdays October 19, 26, November 2, 9, 16 from 7:30 to 9 pm. Please register with the Trinity Office Administrator. **OUR HOME AND TREATY LAND** costs \$12 each or can be ordered in a digital form from Wood Lake Books. Nanockashee Jake Charles from the Chippewas of Georgina Island agreed to be our Indigenous Participant.