

## **SUNDAY OF NATIONAL TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION DAY October 1, 2023**

After his final entry into the Village of Peace Jerusalem, Creator Sets Free Jesus clearly knows about what will happen to him in the coming week. Those in positions of religious, political, and economic power---the Scroll Keepers, the Temple Priests, the Righteous Ones, the Wealthy Landowners, the Head Holy Men---the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees---burned with rage and sought to do him harm.

### **Read Matthew 21:23-32. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?**

At the very beginning of his ministry as set out in the gospel of Matthew, Creator Sets Free Jesus learns about how his own journey will play out over the coming years. The One who prepared the way for Creator Sets Free Jesus was arrested and eventually was beheaded in a prison cell by those in power. This event pointed to a deep darkness---the very real presence of evil in the world. In following the words of Isaiah, Creator Sets Free Jesus brings light into the lives of those facing the darkness of death. Over the course of three years, Creator Sets Free Jesus brings Creator's blessings on the poor and those whose spirits are broken. Creator Sets Free Jesus brings Creator's blessings on those who walk the trail of tears and gives them comfort. Creator Sets Free Jesus brings Creator's blessings on those who hunger and thirst for justice. Creator Sets Free Jesus brings Creator's blessings to rest on those who are merciful and full of lovingkindness. Creator Sets Free Jesus brings Creator's blessings on those who seek to be pure of heart and to accomplish Creator's/Great Spirits purposes. Today, in this gospel reading, those in positions of religious, political, and economic power challenge Creator Sets Free Jesus, seeking to trap him in his own words. In response, Creator Sets Free Jesus answers with a challenge of his own, **"The purification ceremony performed by the Gift of Goodwill John---baptisms taking place in the flowing waters of the Jordan River---was it from the Spirit World above or did it come from human beings?" Matthew 21:25**

What a quandary! One answer will put Creator Sets Free Jesus in a position to ask why those in positions of power refused to listen to the teachings of the Gift of Goodwill John and acknowledge the One who sent him out onto the land as a Prophet, speaking the Words of the Source of All Life and Love. The second answer will upset those who turned their lives around so they could move forward into new life after watching and listening to the Baptizer. Through the running waters of the Jordan River, many were cleansed and rose up out of these waters to give Creator/Great Spirit thanks and be a blessing to others. Creator Sets Free Jesus speaks truth to power!

In using a short story, Creator Sets Free Jesus brings home his point, speaking directly to those in positions of religious, political, and economic power---to those who live without light. The answer to this question is obvious: the child whose priorities changed and showed up to do the work found favour while the child who did not show up to complete the tasks set out by the Caregiver could be expected to meet with some disappointment.

Creator Sets Free Jesus points out that Gift of Goodwill John did some amazing work in his short lifetime. Tax collectors and sex workers turned their lives around and emerged from the waters of baptism to live their lives differently. It takes a great deal of energy and an amazing amount of support to leave behind the violence and pain closely associated with these kinds of employment.

### **Reread Matthew 21:23-32. What is God saying to us in this Scripture reading?**

Creator Sets Free Jesus is prepared to go to great lengths to put Human Beings into right relationships with the Source of All Life and Love. You and I are not offered new life because of anything that we do or the beliefs which guide us on our journey in this creation, however short or long that journey is. Creator/Great Spirit not only sent Gift of Goodwill John as one of a long line of Prophets out onto the land but Creator/Great Spirit sent Creator Sets Free Jesus into this creation to show Human Beings how to be generous and compassionate to the most vulnerable. The Source of All Life and Love has faith in Human Beings. We are trusted. We are beloved. Out of an abundance in this creation, we are given much more

than food, water, clean air, shelter, medicines, and clothing. The Source of All Life and Love made a covenant with Human Beings, sending us a multitude of Teachers to help us be whom we are intended to be.

Settlers and Newcomers arrived on this part of the planet and baptized various parts of Turtle Island for their respective monarch, plunging their swords into the soil and claiming these lands for Christ. For a while, some Settlers and Newcomers respected Indigenous Peoples as equals, living by peace and friendship treaties. As successive waves of immigrants arrived on these shores, Indigenous Peoples observed that Settlers and Newcomers lived with one foot in the world from which they came and one foot on these lands. At worst, the Indigenous Peoples were subjugated as “savages” and “enemies of Christ”. At best, Indigenous Peoples became dependants of the Crown, to be dispossessed of their traditional territories and placed on tiny reservations amounting to a very small percentage of the lands given to them by Creator/Great Spirit. Representatives of various levels of government moved Indigenous Peoples from place to place, forcing them off lands desired for farming and wanted for different kinds of resource exploitation by Settlers and Newcomers. After Confederation, Indigenous Peoples were oppressed by more aggressive policies and practices which destroyed well-established political, economic, familial, communal, and spiritual sets of relationships in place for thousands of years. The lands and waters of this part of the planet suffered too. In the name of Christianity, we caused considerable spiritual harm.

In spite of what happened in the past, Indigenous Peoples are working hard to recover their language, their knowledge of the universe, their traditional ways of governing themselves as sovereign nations, and their understanding of themselves as belonging to a complex web of relationships with other Human Beings as well as all of their other relatives who are more-than-human Beings. Their cultural practices equip each member to experience themselves as unique individuals with gifts and strengths to contribute to the health and well-being of their respective communities. At the Chippewas of Georgina Island Pow Wow last weekend, Anishinaabemowin was spoken, particular leaders, Elders, Dancers, and Drumming Circles were identified, a variety of teachings were shared by the Emcee providing those present with some history and pertinent information for the benefit of all, and lots of humour encouraging everyone present. For me, it was awesome to watch young children who were just learning to walk, older children, and youth dressed in Regalia and Dancing inside the Pow Wow Circle, proud to show everyone all that they were learning and to offer prayers. Their ceremonies and their spiritual practices connect them to Creator/Great Spirit, filling them often with awe and wonder on the journey from birth to their final breath.

Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS** and published this amazing book ten years ago. It is a book best read or heard in its audible format one chapter at a time, allowing the reader or listener time to process emotions and reflect on the content presented for our benefit.

As a member of Citizen Potawatomi Nation, Dr. Wall Kimmerer introduces us to the wealth of knowledge and wisdom available to us from Indigenous Peoples who walk the good road with Creator/Great Spirit. As a Botanist and professor at New York State University on the southern shores of Onondaga Lake in the Finger Lakes part of northern New York, Dr. Wall Kimmerer introduces us to the application of science in understanding the mechanics of how nature works. It is fascinating to learn about how sap moves from the roots of maple trees up to the buds in the branches as light intensifies early in spring and then how starts travel from the leaves back to the roots during the growing season. It is amazing to consider how salmon swimming in the depths of the ocean know when and where to return up particular rivers of fresh water to spawning beds higher in the mountains. It is incredible to learn about how many ways cattails plants growing in marshes provide materials for shelter which expand when wet to keep inhabitants dry and shrink in dry heat to allow cool airs inside a wigwam, soothing ointment for bug bites, pieces of stalk for food, gooey substances for waterproofing, torches, and even flour for baking. Throughout this book, Robin Wall Kimmerer weaves together three strands: scientific knowledge, Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and the work of caring for Creator's/Great Spirit's creation, just like sweetgrass is braided together and is much stronger than in single strands.

As a single mother of two daughters, Dr. Wall Kimmerer introduces us to a tiny pond on a small tract of land at the headwaters of a stream, flowing downwards to Lake Onondaga Lake. This pond became like another room in their home where she and her daughters skated in the winter, watched the new life come into being as the ice and snow receded, occasionally swam in the pond's cool waters, sunbathed and picnicked in the warmth of the longest days in the year, gathered for campfires in the cool evenings of the fall, and provided a magnificent view of the night skies with thousands of stars, some planets, and meteor showers all year round. Downstream from this pond, Onondaga Lake has been identified as having nine superfund sites where toxic chemical sludge from over 150 years of aggressive industrial production and the accumulation of untreated sewage from Syracuse earlier in urban development caused so much environmental damage that it will take billions of dollars and decades to restore the lake herself, land along the shoreline, and her watershed to somewhat resemble their original state.

Along the edge of this pond, Dr. Wall Kimmerer planted sweetgrass, also known as the hair of Mother Earth. Over the years, this pond also provided a wealth of nutrients for her garden and willow sticks to hold up plants. She enlisted the help of her daughters in digging the soil, planting the seeds for all kinds of vegetables and flowers, weeding, and then harvesting these plants. As a family, they grew raspberries, squash, basil, potatoes, asparagus, lettuce, kale, beets, broccoli, peppers, brussels sprouts, carrots, dill, onions, leeks, spinach, tomatoes, stalks of corn, sunflowers, asters and goldenrod. One day in this garden, Dr. Wall Kimmerer harvested some beans to prepare a meal and to freeze some for the winter ahead. The smell of ripe tomatoes filled her nostrils. Orioles sang in the trees. Chickadees were picking at the sunflowers strewing empty seeds on the ground. The afternoon sun in early September shone on all of these gifts provided by a generous Creator/Great Spirit. After spending so much time and effort in this garden, Robin Wall Kimmerer suddenly realized that the land loved her back. In that moment, she was reminded of instances when she would ask her young daughter's: "How much do I love you?". Her daughters would answer, "Ttthhiiiiisssss much!!!" spreading their arms out wide. Robin Wall Kimmerer named this experience her epiphany of the beans. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and as a Botanist, Dr. Wall Kimmerer had spent a lot of time thinking about her relationship to the land and what she as a Human Being could give back in building sustainable relationships with ecosystems. particularly in the place where she was living. She knew that Mother Earth loved her just like she loved each of her daughters.

Social psychologists list a number of behaviours through which one person demonstrates love to another:

- Nurturing health and well-being,
- Providing protection from harm,
- Encouraging individual growth and development,
- Generating desire to be together,
- Working together sharing a common goal,
- Sharing values,
- Celebrating accomplishments,
- Experiencing interdependence,
- Making sacrifices for the other,
- Creating beauty.

These behaviours demonstrate profound connections between Human Beings. Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, "**Can these behaviours demonstrate love between a carefully tended piece of land and a person?**" Dr. Wall Kimmerer concluded that the exchange between plants and people shapes the ongoing evolution of both plants and Human Beings. She says much more about this reciprocal relationship, identifying this relationship as a mutually taming evolution.

Dr. Wall Kimmerer challenges her students, asking them if they believe that Mother Earth loves them. As a mother out in her garden pulling weeds, she takes out her cell phone, and calls her older adult daughter who lives across the continent.

She discovers that this daughter too is weeding in her own garden. Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, **“Does your garden love you back?”** After a short pause, this daughter answers, **“ I’m certain of it!”** Then this daughter says, **“My garden takes care of me like my own mama!”** Her younger daughter works with the poor and homeless in an urban centre, together planting seeds in common places, carefully tending these plants, and harvesting the produce to put food on tables and in stomachs.

**Reread Matthew 21:23-32. What is God calling us to be and do?**

Creator/Great Spirit trusts us. Creator/Great Spirit continues to send us Teachers so that Human Beings can walk the good road, making choices which bring life and fill us with thanksgiving. Creator Sets Free Jesus continues to teach Human Beings how to be generous and show lovingkindness to the most vulnerable, just as Creator/Great Spirit has done for us in the past, is doing for us in the present, and will do for our grandchildren’s grandchildren in the future.

**Let us open ourselves to our own epiphanies, acknowledging that Human Beings are well loved and are offered many opportunities to return that loving kindness to all of creation entrusted to our care.**

**Carefully tended pieces of land and waters demonstrate to us a profound love.**

**Let us express our love towards these pieces of land and waters in return.**