

## **\*Reflection for the Reign of Christ November 26, 2023**

Creator Sets Free Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem for the last time so he spends time with those closest to him teaching by telling parables to prepare them for what will happen to him. Creator Sets Free Jesus uses a story which everyone knew in order to make a twist in the plotline. Each Human Being has some ideas about the end of time in this creation and about what will happen. Whenever, Creator Sets Free Jesus uses one of these parables, those watching and listening are given an opportunity to feel uncomfortable before being introduced to a paradigm shift. In the gospel of Matthew, Creator Sets Free begins his ministry by climbing a mountain as Moses did in his generation and bringing a new way of living to those closest to him and those in the crowds. In today's gospel reading, you and I are being challenged to let ourselves feel uncomfortable enough to be open to whatever Creator/Great Spirit will reveal. None of us know the day and hour when these events will take place.

### **Read Matthew 25: 31-46 What catches my attention in this gospel reading?**

As an Anglican from birth, I have always understood this gospel story to take place in a throne room. At that time, Queen Elizabeth II had just completed her first year as monarch. At this point in time, King Charles III is the Defender of the Faith and the Head of the Church of England. As Christians, we often pray to our Lord and King. In Hebrew apocalyptic literature, at the end of time, a Mighty Ruler would rise up out of the Mediterranean Sea and move eastward towards Jerusalem among the clouds with a heavenly host of armed warriors. For the Hebrew People, this Mighty Ruler was expected to welcome the Righteous into a new world coming into creation and in the same moment condemn the wicked to the eternal flames of Gehenna. For those who have experienced intense oppression, removal from their traditional lands, and the destruction of their families, belonging to a community of faith who seek justice is very desirable.

Matthew sets out a way of life for those seeking to connect with the Source of All Life and Love. In the First Nations Version of the New Testament, this way of life is not very complicated. The True Human Being sitting in the Seat of Honour proclaims that the blessing of Creator/Great Spirit will rest on those who have walked the good road. This good road is set in creation by the Creator/Great Spirit with all manner of choices to be made along the path. Not only is this good road visible but Creator/Great Spirit walks with us. In this parable, the Honoured One the Chief identifies those who are faithful and carry out their responsibilities with integrity. The Honoured One the Chief says, **"I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was hungry and you fed me. I was a stranger and you gave me lodging. When I needed clothes, you gave me something to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me. When I was in prison, you visited me."** **Matthew 25: 35, 36.** It is clear that those who believe in the generosity and compassion of Creator/Great Spirit will put their faith into action when we are given opportunities to do so. Those who are generous and compassionate like Creator/Great Spirit will look into every face and see the face of Creator Sets Free Jesus and will listen to the voices of each person and hear the voice of the One sent into the world by the Source of All Life and Love. For those who walk the good road, the Honoured One the Chief says, **"These ones will enter the life of the world to come that never fades away, full of beauty and harmony!"** **Matthew 25: 46b.**

### **Reread Matthew 25: 31-46. What is God saying to us?**

For those who have grown up in Western Christianity, this teaching of Jesus focuses our attention on our relationships with other Human Beings. We are challenged to see the face of Jesus in those who do not have safe, clean water available in their homes...in those who do not have enough food to eat and to feed their children and grandchildren...in those who do not have shelter from the elements...in those who need clothing to keep them warm in the colder months and protected from the sun's rays in the hotter months...in those who suffer medical afflictions or mental health anguish...in those who are imprisoned or bound by destructive behaviours. On this planet, there are many vulnerable Human Beings.

For Indigenous Peoples, this gospel story speaks good news from a different cultural and spiritual lens. Indigenous Peoples understand themselves to belong to a much larger sets of relationships. Not only are other Human Beings part of this complex web but creation provides Indigenous Peoples with a host of other Beings who are more-than-human and are part of their kinship network. The Human Community is brought together with the Ecological Community. Theologians from parts of the world impacted by the dynamics of colonization are identifying this view of the universe as “**the community of creation**” or as Indigenous Peoples say, “**all my relations**”. With this cultural and spiritual lens, Creator/Great Spirit seeks justice not only for Human Beings but for all of the Beings who are more-than-human. Who is effected by contaminated waters, polluted air, and chemically saturated land? Who does not have enough nourishment to grow and produce for all in the food chain? Who are exposed to floods, earthquakes, molten lava, plastic beads in waters? Who are suffering from diseases, invasive species, and extirpation? On Mother Earth, there are many vulnerable Beings who are more-than-human.

In the book **OUR HOME AND TREATY LAND: WALKING OUR CREATION STORY (Wood Lake Books, 2022)**, an Anglican Deacon and Professor of Indigenous Studies at the Vancouver School of Theology Ray Aldred and a Lutheran Pastor and Professor of Theological Studies at Concordia University in Montreal make us uncomfortable and yet challenge us to move forward in our relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Ray Aldred is also a member of Swan River Cree Nation in northern Alberta whose traditional territories are located on the southern shores of Lesser Slave Lake, northwest of Edmonton. In the Cree Creation Story, Creator thinks and creation comes into being known in nehiyaw (Cree) as *askihk*...the plants, trees, shrubs, flowers, the fungi, the living creatures in the waters, the winged creatures, the creeping creatures on and in the soil, the four legged creatures who walk, the waters themselves, the mountains, the rocks, the grains of sand, the minerals of Mother Earth, and even the smallest particles of the universe. All of these Beings provide all that is needed each day for the last-to-be-created, Human Beings. All created by Creator/Great Spirit are good. Ray Aldred points out that Creator/Great Spirit can be known in every aspect of creation. For Indigenous Peoples, the incarnation applies to much more than One Truly Human Being sent to live among us, beginning as a newborn infant born of a young woman in a stable. The sacred can be found in every aspect of this universe. With this cultural and spiritual lens, the identity of each Human Being and each of those who are more-than-human is much bigger than our individual selves. Indigenous spiritualities are rooted in the land where the presence and compassion of Creator/Great Spirit can be encountered everywhere. Over the centuries, Western Christianity has developed theological doctrines based on the separation of Creator from creation and that Human Beings are ranked at the top of a hierarchy with the right to subdue every part of creation as well as those who deemed to be pagans and heathens or non-Christians. In such a universe, Creator is eternal while creation is populated by alienated individual parts. Western Christianity maintains that Human Beings are more than merely finite and fragile. Human Beings live apart from each other and seek to meet their own self-centred needs and desires without any concern about the consequences of what is said or done. Western Christianity sets out that Creator is Holy while Human Beings are sinners in need of salvation. As Ray Aldred and Matthew Anderson point out Western Christianity teaches complex answers for questions few people are asking today. Indigenous spiritualities arise from being out on *askihk* and encountering Creator/Great Spirit through a variety of Teachers. Human Beings learn to express gratitude for how we are nourished physically and spiritually each and every day. Out of this gratitude, Human Beings learn to give back...to reciprocate...with the same generosity and compassion demonstrated to us. To walk in a good way means so much more than ensuring that all that we say and do becomes a blessing for other Human Beings as practiced through the theologies of Western Christianity. To walk in a good way for Indigenous Peoples means that Human Beings learn to give back...to reciprocate...with all of creation throughout the universe. Those who use the lens of Indigenous spiritualities open themselves as Human Beings to applying the teachings of this gospel reading in a much broader interpretation.

Indigenous wisdom maintains that a Human Being owns nothing more than what each of us can carry. *Askihk* is a place where Creator/Great Spirit is encountered and continues to create new life. Land is a place where Human Beings discover the spiritual energy of Creator/Great Spirit present so unique connections are made. Land becomes a source of

belonging. Land is a place where we are safe and all our needs are being met. Land is where the Ancestors have walked in a good way, benefiting from the abundance provided for Indigenous Peoples to thrive for thousands of years. Land is where our grandchildren's grandchildren will benefit from the generosity and compassion of Creator/Great Spirit **IF WE LEARN HOW TO WALK IN A GOOD WAY AND CARE FOR THIS CREATION AS WE WERE INTENDED TO BE AND DO**. Land is a gift from Creator/Great Spirit. For Indigenous Peoples, land is much more than a commodity to be purchased and sold as a means of increasing our personal wealth. Land is not a space containing natural resources to be exploited by those who have wealth and political power. Land is not a source of belongings. Land is not private property. Land is a gift from Creator/Great Spirit. Land is to be shared and cared for by all.

At Trinity beginning in 2011, members provided leadership with others from a variety of Anglican Churches in southern Ontario with the former National Indigenous Archbishop forming an organic group of supporters known in Anishinaabemowin as **Pimatisiwin Nipi**. We learned that a former Chief of Pikangikum First Nation was distressed by the sense of hopelessness among youth in Indigenous communities and the numbers of these youth who committed suicide. The provision of safe, clean, and running water was identified by this former Chief as a way of giving youth hope that people cared for them. Parishioners were generous and over \$900,000 was raised for Pikangikum. Chief Dean Owen and Council choose 46 of the most vulnerable in Pikangikum to have water and wastewater tanks installed along with a hot water tank and a bathroom constructed. Youth were also involved in these phases of construction and learned valuable skills for employment in water treatment and distribution systems. Chief Dean Owen was very creative in renovating existing buildings to provide housing and in constructing the shells of houses with larger water tanks and wastewater tanks. Young parents who were seeking homes for their children then completed the interiors according to what they needed. The current Chief Shirley Keeper and Council will use the remaining \$250,000 held by the Primates World Relief and Development Fund for providing larger water tanks, larger wastewater tanks, a hot water heater, and plumbing for another batch of new homes to be built as federal funds become available for this construction.

In October 2022, Bishop Lydia Mamakwa and I spoke to the leadership of the Shibogama Tribal Council about the willingness for **Pimatisiwin Nipi** to work collaboratively in bringing safe, clean water to the five Indigenous Peoples among fly-in communities in that part of northwestern Ontario. Chief Eddie Mamakwa from Kingfisher Lake First Nation explained the need for a second water truck to deliver safe, clean water to half of their community who were not connected to the waterlines from their recently updated water treatment plant. During the past year, **Pimatisiwin Nipi** raised \$135,000 towards the cost of this much needed second water truck. In conversations with PWRDF, Chief Eddie Mamakwa and Council decided to provide specifications for the production of a new truck in Winnipeg since members of this community know what is needed in such a vehicle in dealing with the weather and the conditions of their gravel roads. Unlike Pikangikum, Kingfisher Lake is an Anglican community with St. Matthew's Mission House historically at the centre of this Indigenous community. In raising \$35,000, we seek to communicate that as Followers of Creator Sets Free Jesus in southern Ontario, justice is important to our walk of faith. Early in November 2023, a youth took her life. The whole community is impacted. The Chief and Council as well as Bishop Lydia Mamakwa and the leadership at St. Matthew's Mission House attend the family home, providing physical, emotional, and spiritual support for the caregivers, family members, friends of this youth, and everyone in the community. Ceremonies, songs, and stories are important sources of support. Getting out on the land helps make connections with Creator/Great Spirit and with the Ancestors.

### **Reread Matthew 25:31 to 46. What is God calling us to be and do?**

In listening to Creator Sets Free Jesus tell this parable and in watching him take his final steps towards Jerusalem, we are challenged to feel uncomfortable and move away from the usual practice of understanding the main character in the parable as representing Creator/Great Spirit or even Creator Sets Free Jesus. Instead, Creator Sets Free Jesus stands

outside of the drama in this parable. Creator Sets Free Jesus challenges us to listen to him and watch how he takes his last steps and deals with those who would be considered to be the goats in this parable.

In preparation for the Haudenosaunee Grandmother Mim Harder to be interviewed during worship this morning, I sent some questions to her and she responded with a set of questions to focus our conversation. Here is the first question, Mim Harder set out for us: **Can those of Christian faith and First Nations spiritualities walk together in a good way?**

The answer to this question is both NO! and YES!!

We cannot walk together in a good way if Christians do not listen to Indigenous voices and hear the truth about what has happened in the past when Anglicans and Settler-descendants caused physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual harm to Indigenous Peoples. We cannot walk together if we intentionally forget or consciously ignore the history of the land where we live and work and play. We cannot walk together if we are unaware of our responsibilities as partners in Treaties with Indigenous Peoples as equals. We cannot walk together in a good way if we do not examine Western Christianity and commit ourselves to decolonize our understanding of the cultural pieces and beliefs which impede our growth in learning how to reconnect with the Source of All Life and Love.

We can walk together in a good way if continue to work towards dismantling policies and practices promoting systemic racism and cultural genocide. We can walk together if we commit ourselves to respecting all that Indigenous Peoples offer in connecting with Creator/Great Spirit and all whom bear the image and instructions to be generous and compassionate. We can walk together if we learn to express gratitude to the gifts provided by Creator/Great Spirit so that we may flourish and reciprocate showing the same generosity and compassion. We can walk together if we seek to build relationships based on trust and respect. We can walk together if we create ways to communicate with Indigenous Peoples that we are willing to review the Treaties in existence or create new Treaties to maintain peace among equals and provide mutual aid in dealing with in justices and adversity together. We can walk together if we share the land and demonstrate a willingness to ensure that this creation will provide the same benefits to our grandchildren's grandchildren.

As we put one foot in front of the other along the good road, let us pray together as our National Indigenous Archbishop Chris Harper often prays: **MAY WE TRY TO BE BETTER TODAY THAN WE WERE YESTERDAY AND THE DAY BEFORE!!!**