

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 22 2021

Ephesians 6:10-20

Psalm 84

John 6:56-69

In a new cycle of teachings in the Johannine gospel as the celebration of Passover approaches, Jesus proclaims to the crowds, **“I am the bread of life!” John 6:35**. For those with ears to hear and eyes to see and hearts to comprehend, Jesus promises to provide nourishment to those who seek him.

What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

Jesus promises to provide an awesome gift to those who seek him, **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them!” John 6:56**.

Anyone who works their way through the Johannine gospel discovers that the materials of creation communicate to Human Being much more than their physical characteristics. Light is not simply light shining in the darkness. Water is much more than a precious and common substance to protect us in the womb or cleanse us or to quench our thirst. Human birth is much more than the painful work of bringing a human being into this world with the caring support of so many hands. A lamb is so much more than a curious and vulnerable animal who need protection and help finding nourishment. A shepherd can be so much more than a courageous and persistent protector who knows where to find fresh grasses and clean waters.

In finding this teaching in the Johannine gospel, no one could understand these words of Jesus literally. Jesus is not instructing those closest to him to become cannibals, literally eating his flesh and drinking his blood for generations to come. In a simple way, Jesus teaches those who seek to be in a relationship with him beyond his cruel death on a cross how to do this. Every Human Being is invited to become one with Jesus by engaging in the ordinary human activities of eating and drinking in order to be nourished in ways far beyond what we need for our physical bodies. In eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood, Human Beings satisfy far greater appetites needed for us to live and flourish in this creation. Jesus offers Human Beings this gift. Anyone can begin, develop, and maintain an ongoing relationship with this Teacher and Healer by feeding and drinking what Jesus provides of himself!

During this pandemic, Followers of Jesus have been challenged to experience the presence of the Crucified and Risen Jesus in a variety of different ways beyond receiving bread and wine at Eucharistic Celebrations at public gatherings daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or even twice a year at Christmas and Easter. It is fascinating to learn how others have sought and found spiritual nourishment during this time of trial.

In the Johannine gospel, Jesus teaches about the most important aspect of being close to him and doing what Jesus requires. Jesus points out that being in an open and loving relationship with him also places Human Beings in an open and loving relationship with the Source of All Life and Love. Jesus tells us, **“As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats my body and drinks my blood lives because of me!” John 6:57**. Jesus makes it clear that the Creator of the Universe and the Great Spirit which moves across created matter sent him into the world at a particular time in order for Human Beings to be brought into a new creation which lives beyond the limitations of this current creation. As a result, anytime that Human Beings are nourished by the gift of life provided by Jesus in what we identify as his body and blood, then Human Beings are drawn into the gifts of the ongoing presence and work of Creator and Great Spirit bringing about new life in a new creation.

Reread John 6:56-69. What is God saying to us?

Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers instruct those who seek to learn from the many Teachers sent by Creator/Great Spirit about the practices and ceremonies keep the Sacred Fire within each Human Being burning, providing warmth and light.

In her book **MY CONVERSATIONS WITH CANADIANS (BookThug, Toronto, 2018)**, the poet, novelist, storyteller, scriptwriter, actor, and Knowledge Keeper Lee Maracle with the Sto:lo (Lower Fraser River Valley Indigenous Peoples) heritage points out that Indigenous Peoples live by a radically different understanding about being in right relationship with Creator/Great Spirit as well as with other Human Beings and non-human relatives.

Lee Maracle explains the Indigenous approach when a Human Being causes harm. Own the harm that happened. Examine oneself to understand how that instance of harm occurred through a chain of actions and reactions. Learn from the mistake. Make the relationship right. Continue to learn from what happened and how this harm came into being. Continue to deepen our understanding about this harm and grow to act differently in similar circumstances. Lee Maracle also explains the Indigenous framework if one is harmed. Examine the feelings evoked by the experience of harm. Inventory the behaviours which arose out of the experience of being harmed. Re-identify the one's strengths and unique contributions to family, friends, and communities to whom one belongs in order to engage in the process of transformation and remain true to one's authentic self. When harmed, examine the impact and effect of this harm to make it right within oneself so that one will not pass on this harm to those who are innocent. Continue to learn from what happened.

Over years in interactions with Canadians, Lee Maracle has listened to non-Indigenous Settlers speak about the need for forgiveness in the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Settlers. Lee Maracle is acutely aware that disparities exist between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Settlers and Newcomers to Canada. In the past, treaties forged to establish mutual friendships, peaceful relations, and share the lands and waters of Turtle Island became the means to significantly reduce the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples to much smaller reserves and make their members dependent children of the Crown. Since Confederation, the policies and practices of federal and provincial governments upheld by the will of Canadians destroyed the intricate balance of power between men and women in Indigenous communities, broke down family relationships by removing children and youth to attend residential schools as well as to be placed in foster care and for adoption with caregivers who knew very little about traditional cultural knowledge and spiritual practices, and prohibited the use and transmission of Indigenous languages. Chronic underfunding of education, health, and child well-being on reserves promoted the brutality of poverty. Chronic water advisories resulted in many children and youth growing up without being able to turn on the tap and have safe, clean water for bathing and drinking. The pollution of waters through mineral extraction continue to plague too many Indigenous communities in Canada. In her conversations with Canadians speaking in public forums and with publishers as an Indigenous woman writing poetry, novels, and reflections, Lee Maracle concluded that non-Indigenous Settlers sat in a comfortable Chair of Knowledge and responded to issues facing Indigenous Peoples in a number of ways. Some Canadians claimed innocence with respect to the history of oppression and erasure arising from the understanding of how the world works for those with power and wealth. Some Canadians denied that the experiences of Indigenous Peoples happened in the past and that systemic racism continues to harm this generation. Lee Maracle also points out from her conversations with Canadians expect that Indigenous Peoples need to forgive non-Indigenous Settlers for the devastation which continues to cause pain in the everyday lives of Indigenous Peoples. Lee Maracle concludes that these responses come from a reluctance by non-Indigenous Settlers to relinquish the comfortable Chair of Knowledge from which a legacy of dispassion, oppression, and genocide has been perpetuated and continues in this generation. Those who sit on this Chair of Knowledge maintain their perspective, their power, the wealth which comes from the ownership of private property, and the benefits which come from the exploitation of the lands and waters of Turtle Island without consideration of sustainability of this way of life.

Reread John 6:56-69. What is God asking us to be and do?

It is not forgiveness which non-Indigenous Settlers and Newcomers need to seek. Instead, our Chair of Knowledge needs to be dismantled and destroyed in order for our relationships with Indigenous Peoples to move forward in a respectful manner. Listen to Indigenous voices recount the experiences of their ancestors and their own in Canada as we know it today. Be creative in communicating support with Indigenous Peoples in their search for justice. Give thanks for the many ways in which Human Beings are nourished by the Source of All Life and Love.