

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost: July 18, 2021

2 Samuel 7:1-14

Psalm 89:20-28

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus gathers his closest followers together and seeks to find a deserted place to be together. Jesus wants to find out all about what his closest followers are learning from their experiences teaching and healing on their own while he was praying. However, the crowds from the surrounding farms, villages, and cities follow the disciples and do not allow Jesus any opportunity to consolidate their learnings. The crowds find Jesus on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus looks at the crowds and listens to their movements.

The gospel of Mark tells us that Jesus has compassion on the crowds who seek him.

Jesus teaches about the steadfast love and generosity of Creator and Great Spirit. To make his point, Jesus takes five loaves of bread and two small fish, looks up into the heavens, blesses this meager meal, breaks these gifts given by a small child into small pieces, and feeds five thousand people.

Afterwards, Jesus and his closest followers get in a boat and journey across the water, looking for a secluded place to be together. After mooring their boat, the crowds find Jesus and his companion. Jesus then takes his disciples into the villages and cities on the west side of the Sea of Galilee where the soil is fertile and the farms are prosperous. The crowds bring the sick and afflicted to the centres of these communities. Their families and friends believe that Jesus will walk through these public places. Their sick and afflicted are instructed to just reach out and touch the fringe of the garments worn by Jesus as he passes by them. Their families and friends believe that Jesus has the authority and the capability to make their sick and afflicted whole. The sick and afflicted reach out and touch the fringe of the clothing worn by Jesus and these vulnerable members of these communities are healed.

This passage in the gospel of Mark begins by identifying the intentions of the heart of Jesus. Like the Source of All Life and Love, the crowds recognize that Jesus is generous and can bring new life into being. The crowds trust that Jesus lives according to his teachings and that their hope is not misplaced.

For Indigenous Peoples, a good mind comes from a loving and generous heart. With a good mind, each member of an Indigenous People learns how to open themselves to hear what the teachers sent by Creator and Great Spirit want them to know about how to care for themselves and how to care for all of their relatives on Turtle Island. For Indigenous Peoples, the land is not just rocks, dirt, and decaying vegetative materials. The land is not real estate nor property nor a resource. Instead, all the materials of creation as well as the animals, the plants, the mountains, the hills, the winged creatures in the air, the swimming creatures in the waters, the waters themselves, the insects, the critters living in the soils, Grandfather Sun, Grandmother Moon, all of the stars and planets in their courses, and the winds in the air---all these are gifts from Creator/Great Spirit. Each have been given Original Instructions to communicate the generosity and loving intentions of Creator/Great Spirit. Each aspect of creation is a

living being with the capacity to teach Human Beings about the variety of communities to which we as one part of creation belong. Creation provides an amazing number and variety of teachers with whom Human Beings can build relationships and from whom Human Beings can learn an incredible amount. From an Indigenous perspective, each aspect of creation becomes a member of their respective families, like a sister or brother or mother or father or aunt or uncle or grandmother or grandfather or significant caregiver or even a child or a grandchild. These gifts are freely given by Creator/Great Spirit for not only our own benefit but also for the benefit of others. The gifts of the land are not natural resources nor ecosystem services nor capital for exploitation. As Robin Wall Kimmerer who is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, a professor of Environmental Science and Forestry at the State University of New York, and the author of **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed Editions Canada, 2013)** points out, the land is not a source of belongings but a source of belonging.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Indigenous communities encourage members to learn how to be out on the land to gather and hunt for the foods and medicines which have been used by grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great grandparents for many generations. The principles of an honourable harvest are practiced, maintaining relationships with those relatives who become food and medicines for survival of Human Beings. A good mind is needed to ensure that the gifts of Mother Earth will be available for seven generations to come. Elders and Knowledge Keepers also teach the cultural and spiritual practices needed to live in this complex network of relationships and to express gratitude for these unique gifts from creation.

Each aspect of creation makes unique contributions for Human Beings to learn how to walk in a good way on our respective journeys in life. It is amazing to listen to the wind moving through the leaves of trees and grasses in fields. It is inspirational to know how a maple tree produces sap in the transition from winter to spring as well as how the maple nation not only cools the land but also remove carbon out of the atmosphere. It is awesome to hear the music of moving water. It is fascinating to watch animals seek sustenance, protect their young, interact, and even play with each other.

I have always gathered rocks from along the shores of Lake Huron as well as from a variety of places around the world. These stones remind me about awesome views, the sounds associated with each particular place, and often the smells present at that time. In picking up a stone, I am also reminded of the words which Jesus uttered outside the walls of Jerusalem when the crowds were filled with great expectations and hope. Those who had enough wealth were laying down their cloaks in front of him. Others who could not afford to give up their only cloak were strewing palm branches on the ground. At the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus was confronted by some in the crowd who did not believe that Jesus had the same authority as Creator and Great Spirit. Jesus responded to their sinister opposition by saying, **“I tell you, if these (human enthusiasts) were silent, the stones would shout out.” Luke 19:40.** Stones bear witness to much havoc wrought by Human Beings who are invested in maintaining their power and wealth at any cost. Stones also bear witness to the thoughts and intentions of Creator and Great Spirit, communicating powerful messages. Creation is good. Each aspect of creation needs to be respected so that future generations will benefit from the gifts of Mother Earth. Human Beings created in the colours Yellow, Red, Black, and White are each good and valued. Every child matters. Creator/Great Spirit loves

each aspect of creation and provides all that we need to walk in a good way: physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

John Borrows from the Chippewas of Nawash at Neyaashiinigmiing, the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Law at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, and author of **LAW'S INDIGENOUS ETHICS (University of Toronto Press, 2019)** and **THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP: REIMAGINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HISTORICAL TREATIES (Edited by John Borrows and Michael Coyle, University of Toronto Press, 2017)** points out that his Ancestors like other Indigenous Peoples signed treaties agreeing to share the land of their traditional territories with non-Indigenous Settlers these covenants are expected to be in effect “for as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows”. The terms and agreements are now constitutionally protected in Canadian law. As a result, Indigenous wisdom, knowledge, cultural heritage, spiritual practices, and ceremonies based on an Indigenous understanding of land is also legally binding. Promises made by the Crown and by Indigenous Peoples continue to shape a new understanding of these treaties and shape how both Indigenous Peoples as well as non-Indigenous Settlers and Newcomers will move forward together.

For Anishinaabe Peoples, the sun from the Anishinaabemowin word **giizis** represents light, warmth, heat, and sight from four Anishinaabemowin words: **inaasagewin**, **waaseyaawin**, **gizhaatewin**, and **waabamaawin**. The sun stimulates growth, When the sun shines, sunlight falls on everyone without discrimination. Grandfather Sun travels along a path through the sky each day, representing steadfastness and predictability. The sun is a Sacred Fire, kindling life that might otherwise be extinguished. Plants, insects, birds, animals, and Human Beings would not exist without this fire. Indigenous descriptions of the sun contain teachings about how Human Beings can live. In the treaties, the Crown made promises that like the sun, we are expected to practice and apply these Indigenous laws and ethics without discrimination since the sun shines equally on us all. Both non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples are expected to be steady and dependable as the sun travels through the sky each day. Like the sun, we are expected to revive those who lack vitality as the sun strengthens trees and plants in this part of Turtle Island. In following these teachings, both non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples are being nudged forward through reconciliation and working together to develop a healthier relationship with Mother Earth.

For Anishinaabe Peoples, water from the Anishinaabemowin word **nibi** is based on two Anishinaabemowin words **niya** meaning “I am” and **piy** from **pimatisiwin** meaning “living” carrying the meaning “water is life”. As such, water has an agency and life force on her own. Under Indigenous laws and ethics, water can be understood as needing representation by Water Protectors. The mouth of a large river in Anishinaabemowin links two words together **micha** meaning “site” and **zaagiin** meaning “river mouth” or “love”. Rivers flow from a source through lands gathering nutrients along the way to sustain a variety of plants, fish, and other living creatures. In following the teachings about waters, Human Beings come to understand the responsibilities in caring for others and providing aid to the vulnerable. It is interesting that Indigenous teachings also include the waters which surround each of us in our mother’s womb. The Indigenous teachings about water brings Indigenous legal principles and ethics about love as key to understanding treaty relationships.

For Anishinaabe Peoples, grass from the Anishinaabemowin word ***meyashkooshag*** represents one of the medicines so teachings about grass refer to the “strength of the Mother Earth” since photosynthesis uses light to convert elements into sugars in the leaves while roots absorb nutrients from water and soil. Plants deliver energy to other beings and add colours to the environment. When grasses are braided, these braids become stronger together than apart. Human Beings are understood to be strong together than when separated. The teachings of plants bring much to Indigenous law and ethics. Like plants, Human Beings need to find ways to appropriately give ourselves so that others may flourish. Human Being also have responsibilities to draw others to sources of healing found in Mother Earth.

As John Borrows points out, non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples need to move forward in our treaty relationships, building on a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Indigenous law and ethics. These treaties are not historical documents but living covenants expected to last as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows. The next steps on this journey together are important steps to take. As Human Beings, we need to understand the spiritual basis of these treaties, based on an appreciation of the generosity and lovingkindness of Creator/Great Spirit in providing us with the gifts of creation to meet all of our needs for generations to come and in giving us responsibilities to care for Mother Earth. As Human Beings, we need to be open to the role in which creation plays, giving us so many teachers and direction along the way. Out of a generous and loving heart comes a good mind.

Demand has exceeded supply for Orange Shirts to honour residential school survivors and the children who did not return to their Indigenous families and communities. More Adult XL, L, and M have been ordered. If you wish to show solidarity with Indigenous Peoples from coast to coast to coast, place an order with me through my email at davidapfranks@gmail.com or by cell phone at 905-715-9997.

The Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice has just published a marvellous booklet providing a comprehensive history of the relationships between non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous artwork and content contributions are an excellent family and personal resource as a primer. There are awesome links to a variety of resources so that Indigenous voices can be heard and introductions made to Indigenous leaders and storytellers. I will order **LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS VOICES: A DIALOGUE GUIDE ON JUSTICE AND RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS (Novalis, Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice, 2021)**. Each of the 11 chapters has questions for a Sharing Circle as well as recommendations for Classroom Connections. Contact me if you want a copy.