

## Thursday in the First Week of Easter April 16, 2020

Archbishop Mark MacDonald provides leadership with the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples in meeting the needs of Anglicans from coast to coast to coast. In this role, he identifies the importance of putting the gospel at the centre of our lives. As such, in opening meetings of Pimatisiwin Nipi (Pikangikum Water Project), the gospel reading assigned for the day is read three times, responding to these questions each time:

What in the passage catches your attention?

What is God saying in this passage?

What is God calling us to be and do?

In the setting of a meeting, it is fascinating to learn about how Creator speaks to others in the room, how a consensus develops in grappling with the meaning of the passage, and how to apply what we have learned in order to continue Creator's life-giving work. At anytime in the meeting, anyone in the circle can call for the gospel passage to be read again in order to focus and get new direction from Creator. This method can be used also for personal reflection and devotions.

For today, it would be good to apply this method of passage from the Hebrew Scriptures assigned for today Ezekiel 37: 1-14.

As in these extraordinary times, Ezekiel lived in extraordinary times. The People of God had surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar from Babylonia and their leadership had been marched into captivity in a strange land far away from the land which had been given to their ancestors to protect. Since those who had been left behind lost their way and did not follow the treaty which had been made, Nebuchadnezzar returned, utterly destroyed Jerusalem, chained the survivors together, and led these dispirited people to Mesopotamia. Like those of us who continue to seek Creator for nourishment and direction, Ezekiel looked for Creator in the strange land and times in which he found himself and listened to what Creator was saying to all of creation. In one of these moments, Creator led Ezekiel and set him down in the middle of an arid valley scattered full of bones dried by the winds and bleached by the sun as far as his eyes could see. There had not been enough of the twelve tribes left to identify and bury their dead. In this valley, Creator addressed Ezekiel asking him: **Human One, can these bones live again?** Ezekiel 37:3

As the number of deaths due to Covid-19 begin to flatten in Canada, questions are being raised about what the future will be like as we gradually leave our homes and re-establish our common life together.

Twice Ezekiel speaks Creator's words to these dry bones scattered in the valley around him. After the first proclamation, Creator creates what seems impossible. Sinews appear connecting the bones. Flesh fills in the empty spaces giving shape to new human beings. Skin covers this flesh. After a second proclamation, Creator causes winds from every direction to blow across each new human body and fill new lungs with the breath of life. Creator creates new Human Beings who rise up and stand on their feet. For Ezekiel, hope springs to life and he bears witness to what Creator will do.

First contact with Europeans brought many changes to Indigenous Peoples. In the twenty-five years following 1492, disaster came to Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island in the form of slaughter, slavery, and epidemics that resulted in the deaths of millions of Indigenous Peoples. In the more northern waters, European men came to fish off the shores of Turtle Island. On St. Jean Baptiste Day in June 1497, John Cabot landed on what is now known as Cape Bonavista in Newfoundland and then returned to England with stories of his adventure. In 1534, Jacques Cartier left St. Malo in France and explored the western coast of Newfoundland and the lands surrounding what is now known as the Gulf of St. Lawrence, returning to France with two Indigenous people taken from what is now known as Gaspé. From 1603, Samuel de Champlain left the shipyard in Honfleur in France to make his first of over twenty voyages to the eastern coast of this land, up the St. Lawrence River, up the Ottawa River, into the Great Lakes around what is now Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, and into what is now northern New England, meeting with the Montagnais, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Odawa, Nipissing, and Wendat Peoples. Those who traded for furs along the waterways introduced diseases for which Indigenous Peoples had never needed immunity. Those who traded in horses in what is now Mexico and the southern parts of western parts of the USA brought diseases to the plains of Turtle Island which decimated Indigenous Peoples far to the north. On the west coast of Turtle Island, blankets given to Indigenous Peoples led to the spread of smallpox. Along the northern coastline and on the islands offshore, diseases spread. Even chicken pox proved to be deadly. Through chronic underfunding by successive federal governments in health as well as in education, child welfare, and housing, it is not surprising that Indigenous Peoples have been identified as being among the most vulnerable communities in Canada during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Anglican Church of Canada produced a documentary entitled DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY: STOLEN LANDS, STRONG HEART which can be found on the national church website and is well worth watching. The resiliency and leadership of Indigenous Peoples illustrates hope for a new basis for respectful relationships to develop between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples.

Lynn Gehl is an Anishinaabe author with heritage among the Algonquin Peoples with traditional territories in the Ottawa River Valley. Her publication ALLY BILL OF RESPONSIBILITIES is included with this reflection as an attachment. A Google search will lead one to a number of YouTube presentations.

For those who appreciate singing songs of faith, Lauren Daigle sings COME ALIVE DRY BONES with Centric Worship on YouTube. Her story about her battle with an auto-immune disease is also inspirational.

Creator is leading us into a time to shape the future in terms of how all of the Peoples of Mother Earth can make changes to protect the most vulnerable among us and to explore ways to live with Indigenous Peoples here on Turtle Island.

Reverend David Franks