

## Thursday in the Ninth Week after Pentecost August 6, 2020

In John's gospel, Jesus walks towards his cousin John who has been calling people in the wilderness to turn their lives around and begin anew through the waters of baptism. Jesus listens as the son of his mother's sister tells everyone what Creator and the Great Spirit are doing for all of the peoples of Mother Earth. Jesus is identified as being unique in all creation. Two of the disciples of John the Baptizer turn to Jesus, telling Jesus that they want to stay with him and learn from him. One of these two disciples then spoke to his brother in their home village of Bethsaida and brought his brother to meet Jesus. In one day, three men opened themselves to walk in a new direction and journey with a new Teacher.

### **Read John 1:43-51. What catches my attention in this reading of the gospel?**

On the following day, Jesus wants to walk to Galilee but at the beginning of this journey he found Philip who also lived in Bethsaida. Jesus gives Philip a simple message, "Follow me." Like Andrew who sought out his brother Simon, Philip looked for his brother Nathanael and brought him to Jesus too. So now there are five who open themselves to learn from the Teacher who has been sent by Creator and the Great Spirit into the world. According to John the Baptizer, this Teacher will fulfil promises made through the ages to people who saw visions and dreamed dreams of a new age and a new creation coming into being. Jesus promises each of his followers, **"I assure you that you will see heaven open and God's angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Human One."** John 1:51.

This story celebrates a new beginning. Yet, much had happened in the backstories of each of these human beings who came out to the wilderness to find a generous and loving Creator and discovered ways to open themselves to new possibilities.

### **Read John 1:43-51. What is God saying in this passage?**

It is amazing to discover that Creator cares for each and all of us. Each and all of us are worthy of Creator's generosity and lovingkindness as our ancestors of faith have known. Those original followers still needed another three years to journey with the Teacher to learn more about what Creator and the Great Spirit were doing with Jesus. Then, these followers had more to learn until the end of their own days when their visions of a new creation would be fulfilled.

The traditional territories of the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation lie around the waters of what is now known as Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. Through Treaty 8, this People established a community on the south eastern shores. Their traditional territories encompassed both the peat and lichen covered Barrens that once teemed with caribou herds during the summer calving ground and the boreal forest of white and black spruce in the winter. Great Slave Lake is the deepest lake on the northern part of Turtle Island. Both tundra and taiga also are home to moose and muskox. The deep blue-green waters teem with fish. Their ancestors connected with Creator and cared for the lands and waters which sustained them. For thousands of years, Ceremonies honoured Creator and all that Creator provided. At the mouth of what is now known as the Lockhart River, a wide sandy delta has become a sacred place. Up the river, a frothy waterfall is believed to be the home of Tsankui Theda (the

Old Lady or Grandmother) for over 11, 700 years when beavers were the size of bears according to stories handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next generation. This place too is a sacred location in this part of Turtle Island. In this generation, twice as many of the Denesoline (Chipewyan People) live scattered among other Peoples from coast to coast to coast. In order to preserve the Land of the Ancestors, a succession of Chiefs, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers have articulated a vision of the work that needs to be done to conserve that lands and waters which will maintain clean water and food security for generations of both Indigenous Peoples and Settlers to come.

In the vast portion of land and waters between what is now known at the Mackenzie River watershed which flows north to the Arctic Ocean and the Thelon River watershed which flows east to Hudson Bay, a new National Park has been established. Thaidene Nene stretches some 400 km across the 62<sup>nd</sup> parallel in a north westerly to a south easterly direction along the treeline and permafrost line. These lands and waters sustain an incredible biodiversity that is well worth preserving for generations to come.

During the last 50 years, Chiefs, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers have been persistent in their conflict with the plans made by the federal government, the territorial government, and various resource development initiatives. In 1970, the Denesoline of Lutsel K'e did not consent to the loss of their traditional hunting and gathering way of life. The plans by power companies to stake out potential hydro sources along the waterways and by Parks Canada to expropriate this piece of real estate were stopped. In 1982, a second attempt at negotiation was not acceptable for the Denesoline of Lutsel K'e. In the 1990's, the establishment of two diamond mines were linked to the significant decline of the caribou herds. Five Indigenous Peoples joined together to move the federal and territorial governments towards an understanding about the intent of Treaty 8. The Gwich'in People to the west as well as Inuvialuit Peoples to the east and north were part of the discussions to resolve the problems and re-establish right relations between Indigenous Peoples and Settlers. Out of these discussions beginning in 2000, a common vision for the protection of the caribou habitat and the headlands of these sacred watersheds was forged. The National Park grew to become almost 5 times the size of the original plan. Through the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board completed in 2010, projected routes for powerlines proposed by Deze Energy Corporation were rejected and alternate routes were not utilized by the power company. In 2013, the Denesoline of Lutsel K'e made an agreement with Parks Canada reduced the size of Thaidene Nene to only four times the size of the original plan. In 2018, Denesoline of Lutsel K'e made an agreement with the government of the Northwest Territories. The area for Thaidene Nene as established in 2013 became the area in which mining, oil and gas, mineral exploration, large scale commercial fishing, and large scale hydroelectric projects would not occur. The territorial government designated an additional area of land and water a little larger than the original size of the National Park was designated as a wildlife conservation area where small scale hydroelectric development, quarrying, and infrastructure corridors could be utilized to service the National Park or the Denesoline of Lutsel K'e. Thaidene Nene will also be co-managed by federal, territorial, and Indigenous governments. The official signing happened with Ceremonies in February 2019.

Chiefs, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers have connected with youth from Denesoline of Lutsel K'e who live in both a virtual world and the traditional territories of their ancestors. The Ni Hat'Ni Dene Rangers

accompany the leaders of their community out on the land and waters learning to protect what Creator provided their ancestors, the stories of their People, the Ceremonies which honour Creator and all their relations, and their language.

**Read John 1:43-51. What is God calling us to be and do?**

Trust is the key to an amazing relationship. Creator cares profoundly for each and all of us. Each and all of us are worthy of Creator's generosity and loving kindness. Open up to all that Creator provides. Be willing to learn how to treasure the gifts Creator gives to bring new life into being. Join with others who honour Creator and commit themselves to ensuring that Creator's gifts are available for generations into the future.

Read LAND OF THE ANCESTORS by author Laurie Sarkadi and photographer Pat Kane in CANADIAN GEOGRAPHIC July/August 2020.

Continue reading THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP: REIMAGINING THE Implementation of Historical Treaties by editors John Borrows and Michael Coyle (University of Toronto Press 2017).

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