

## Reflection for Thursday in the Second Week after Pentecost June 11, 2020

As Jesus journeys around the Sea of Galilee, he prepares those who follow him for what will happen to him in his last days. His closest followers ask him about who is the greatest in the world to come. Jesus brings a little child into the middle of this inner circle. Jesus responds to their question by teaching about Creator's compassion for those who are most vulnerable and sets out some direction about how to deal with those who are truly lost and are oblivious to the harm that they have done.

### Read Matthew 18:10-20. What catches my attention in this Gospel reading?

An Elder pointed out to me once that Indigenous Peoples did not have animals like sheep to tend. However, when this passage is told about the one young lamb who wanders from the flock, it is easy for Indigenous Peoples to consider how a young and vulnerable relative could get lost. Those who have parented and discovered the terror of having a young child disappear can easily relate to the story which Jesus tells. Twelve year old Jesus heard from his biological mother and his father about their concerns on their return journey from the Temple in Jerusalem when he was discovered not to be among the families traveling together. Certainly, a search would begin for the young and vulnerable one. It was terrifying gathering with extended family to look at a model railway display of interest to my father and then to look down to discover that my three year old daughter had disappeared. The small craft and gardening centre was quickly searched. A description of my daughter was made available to a number of the workers as extended family members searched in desperation. One of the salespeople found her and stood her up on a table for all to see. Our daughter had looked at the model trains and ducked underneath at table, fascinated by the tunnels created by the table cloths and thrilled to run up and down underneath these tables. We celebrated when the lost was found. Everyone who was aware of what had happened shared our joy. It is easy to understand this teaching of Jesus and imagine the joy which Creator experiences when one who has been lost is found and is safe.

The next teaching of Jesus is more difficult to comprehend in relation to the first teaching. We live in a world where so many differences are evident. People speak different languages. Skin ranges in a variety of colours and hues. People think and feel differently than others who may look and sound very similar. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not safe for some people to let others know about their sexual orientation and their involvement in healthy, caring relationships which are not heterosexual. Others face rejection in their exploration about alternate ways of understanding their gender roles with others. In this global village, the place and time of our birth and the colour of our parents skin creates different possibilities for the future. Unfortunately, access to wealth and the availability of power is not the same for every person on Mother Earth. Experiences in life also shape our identities. Differences between people can cause friction and during the ensuing conflict, people can be harmed. In this second teaching, Jesus sets out a process so that differences in perspectives can be identified, discussed, lots of time is required as consensus develops in a common search for a different way of living and doing things together. Skills in speaking, in listening, and in building a new creative way forward are needed. This takes time. Often the perspectives, energy, and commitment of others help find a better way ahead for everyone. Jesus points out, **"Again, I reassure you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, then my Father who is in heaven will do it for you."** Matthew 18:19. It is clear for Jesus that

the Source of Life and Love needs to be invited to participate in the constructive resolution of deeply divides people and causes harm to each other. Creator continues to work in people's lives. Jesus challenges those who are open to taking direction from Creator in the speaking and in the listening.

**Read Matthew 18:10-20. What is God saying to us in this passage?**

Some terrible events happened in the last couple of weeks. In Minneapolis, a white police officer hauled down a handcuffed black man and then knelt on his neck for almost 9 minutes with the help of three other police officers. Floyd George repeatedly told the police officers that he couldn't breathe. Members of the public shouted at the police to remove his knee as the incident was being videotaped. During a Red Table Wisdom Talk on a ZOOM webinar hosted by Reach Yoga, Elder Kahontakwas Diane Longboat from Six Nations wondered if the United States of America had returned to 1968 with the police brutality and riots which had erupted as a result of this one act of racialized violence. In New Brunswick, a RCMP Office responded to a call and went to complete a well-being check on a young mother from Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation near Tofino on Vancouver Island who had moved to Edmundson in order to be close to her biological mother who was caring for her daughter. Chantel Moore was known to have mental health problems so when she brandished a knife in front of the police officer, she was shot five times. She became another one of the many Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada. A coalition of Maliseet First Nations living along the St. John River Valley petitioned the Premier of New Brunswick for an independent inquiry into this young woman's death. Some 30 Inuit women in Nunavut sought an independent inquiry about their experiences of excessive violence and persistent racism with RCMP Officers, particularly when seeking safety due to instances of domestic violence and sexual assaults. The Chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation left a casino in Fort McMurray with his wife and niece and was stopped by RCMP Officers because his truck had an expired license plate. Allan Adam was assaulted in the parking lot while his beating was videotaped by two bystanders. His wife was forcibly removed from the driver's seat and a bystander told the police to be less aggressive. He suffered serious injuries to his head, published photos of these injuries, and has sought an independent inquiry with support from the Alberta Regional Chief Marlene Poitras. In a ZOOM webinar as part of her graduate studies program, Anne Spice from Kwanlin Dun First Nation reviewed the use of excessive force by the RCMP in the removal of Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs and women who were participating in a ceremony honouring Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. As one prominent political leader pointed out, these Indigenous People were "terrorists" so he supported the immediate use of excessive force by the RCMP. During a weekend snowshoe excursion in Huntsville, I showed my brother pictures of these individuals and he commented that they looked like people who worked with him at the steel mill in Oshawa. My Indigenous colleagues and friends have confirmed that both systemic racism in our governments and police forces and particular instances of racism communicated by non-Indigenous Canadians happen are still happening.

Among Indigenous Peoples, the use of Sacred Circles in order to resolve difficult conflicts sometimes takes some time and includes ceremonies to honour Creator's presence and ongoing work in the lives of everyone in a particular Sacred Circle. As Jesus points out to his followers, there is great joy when those lost in conflict find a healthy way forward together.

**Read Matthew 18:10-20. What does God ask us to be and do?**

In these times, we have plenty of opportunities to identify instances of racism in our personal interactions and to reflect on what happens in Canada from coast to coast to coast in our complex social, economic, and political relationships. Listen to what is being communicated. Speak in such a way that the perpetrator of racism can hear an alternate way of understanding what is happening. Set up conversations with others who have an investment in establishing respectful and healthy relationships. More conversations and creative problem-solving efforts are needed in order to reduce the racialized violence directed towards Indigenous Peoples, Black citizens, and other racial minorities. In protesting the injustices causing grievous harm, connect with Creator to allow you to be found and held.

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