

Reflection for Thursday in the Third Week after Pentecost June 18, 2020

The Johannine Gospel begins at the beginning of time and space. Creation stories are powerful, teaching us much about Creator and ourselves as Human Beings. Every People who have maintained their language and ceremonies have unique stories about how this world came into being which shapes how Human Beings can live fully.

Read John 1:1-18. What catches my attention in this passage?

Before time and space come into being, Creator lives in community. Creator is not alone. Creator lives with the Word as separate but the same in authority and character. Creator does not need to create. However, Creator and the Word create all creation out of nothing. In every aspect of creation, Creator and the Word are known. Creator and the Word bring life and light into being.

On a clear night on the shores of Lake Huron, the stars dazzle the eyes. A few times, my wife and I took our children down to the beach way past their bedtimes and laid down in the sand as a family to gaze upwards. In preparation, we had looked at a book with glow in the dark celestial arrays. However, there were far too many twinkling lights to be able to identify those clustered together to form scenes described by European astronomers. It was an awesome experience, filling each of the family with feelings of wonder and mystery. Over the years, each of our children had been tortured by evening walks along the beach to view the beauty of sunsets over Lake Huron.

For Indigenous Peoples, Creator provided all that was needed for each community to survive day by day and from one moon to the next moon throughout yearly cycles. With the rising of Elder Brother the Day Sun at the eastern door, light and warmth are brought to all of creation. New life arises out of Mother Earth on Turtle Island because of this energy. Each new day brings new opportunities to live and celebrate all that Creator provides. With the warmth of the sun high in the sky in the middle of the day at the southern door, all that grows flourishes. Energy abounds. Much learning takes place. As the day draws to a close, the sun sets at the western door. Lives come to an end and the journey back into the spiritual world begins. With the warmth of the sun at its weakest at the northern door, creation cools, growth slows, and Mother Earth is covered with blankets of snow. Cold winds bite those who walk the surface of Turtle Island seeking for what Creator provides. Stories and ceremonies communicate the wonder and mystery of Creator's care for Human Beings.

The author of the Johannine Gospel says, **"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen this Word's glory, a glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."** John 1:14. Creator takes a risk and becomes a Human Being so that everyone will know Creator to be gracious and truthful. Power that lasts for eternity is radically different from the authority claimed by those who want to keep their wealth and make others conform to their expectations.

Read John 1:1-18. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Unfortunately, in the past, Christians from Europe understood creation to be owned, to be sold or given to their descendants, and to be exploited for the resources found in the land or waters irregardless of

the consequences. When the explorers, traders, fishermen, and settlers came to this new found land, the land and waters were claimed for their respective monarchs. As a result, millions of the members of Indigenous Peoples were considered to be non-existent, identified as not being human.

Prior to First Contact, Indigenous Peoples had developed complex communities with a variety of languages and spiritual practices. Over thousands of years, a rule of law developed, communicated through stories and ceremonies. For Indigenous Peoples, this rule of law was established and maintained by a living and communal relationship with Creator. Each Clan had a role to play in the survival of the People. Each member of each clan lived into the meaning of their spirit name so everyone was supported to live as Creator intended. Trade flourished among Indigenous Peoples so treaties were made to share the resources of the land and waters with promises to care for Mother Earth. Indigenous Peoples welcomed newcomers to their traditional territories, offered gifts, told stories, participated in welcoming ceremonies, smoked a peace pipe, and sought to trade. With those of European heritage, Indigenous Peoples did what they had always done. The land was Creator's land. Indigenous Peoples believed that Creator provided all that was needed to live and flourish, generation after generation after generation. Indigenous Peoples also believed that every living being and all matter in creation were relatives so each creature and the substance of creation needed to be treated with respect and care.

In 1759, the victory of the British over the French on the Plains of Abraham outside the walls of Quebec City brought an end to fighting in North America between these two adversaries. The Peace of Paris in 1763 removed France as a colonial power from the northern parts of North America. In 1763, King George III set out the Royal Proclamation establishing three key principles for treaty negotiations. Firstly, First Nations were recognized as separate nations living on their traditional territories. Secondly, First Nations who had not ceded their land to the Crown nor allowed the Crown to purchase their land benefited from the protection of the Crown from exploitation by unscrupulous Settlers, particularly those who committed murder or robbery. Thirdly, First Nations had special rights to hunt and fish on their traditional territories. With economic developments over the years, Indigenous Peoples expanded this provision in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to include royalties from forestry and resource extraction from under the earth. Under the protection of the Crown, First Nations also expanded this provision to include healthcare, education, and the protection of their children. In 1764, the principles of the Royal Proclamation were confirmed in the Treaty of Niagara between the Crown and 24 First Nations, including the Seven Nations of Canada and other Anishinaabe Nations living in the Great Lakes watershed. The Haudenosaunee People south of the Niagara River also participated. A new COVENANT CHAIN WAMPUM BELT was created to symbolize the outcome of the treaty negotiations. The Crown represented by Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, utilized the practice of the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch in documenting their treaty by depicting two Peoples holding originally a rope and later an iron chain between themselves. Sir William Johnson commissioned a Covenant Chain of Love and Friendship to be made depicting a silver chain connecting the King and the Indigenous Peoples. As a result, all of the parties expected that the silver in the 1764 Covenant Chain Wampum Belt needed to be polished every year. The Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe Peoples also presented Wampum Belts, representing two parallel lines with the First Nations traveling by canoe and

the Europeans traveling by ship, both parties to the treaty moving forward together respecting each other's languages, cultures, and spiritual practices. Negotiations included sacred ceremonies, much discussion, feasts, and gift giving among equals. In his knowledge of treaty negotiations, Sir William Johnson benefited from his Haudenosaunee wife Molly Brant and the work of raising their eight children together while continuing relationships with the members of her extended family. Two rough gems were located on each end of the Covenant Chain Wampum Belt. When the wampum was laid down, a linear understanding of time represented the European perspective but when the wampum belt was connected by these rough gems, a cyclical understanding of time represented the Indigenous perspective.

In further treaty negotiations, Indigenous Peoples maintain that the intent and spirit of the treaties are more vital than the written summaries set down by non-Indigenous representatives of the Crown. These treaties are expected to last as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows.

Indigenous Peoples see the glory of Creator in all of creation and understand themselves to be stewards of creation, caring for all creatures and the substance of this creation as their relatives in order to survive and flourish for generations to come. Those who follow the Word struggle to identify the subject of our devotion to be generous and caring, full of grace and truth.

Read John 1:1-18. What is God asking us to be and do?

Creator has given us minds and hearts to discern what is good and right and awesome and brings life to all. When other people speak or act to make other human beings less than what Creator intends, you and I need to find ways to communicate the perspective held by Creator and the Word about these people. You and I are being called to know what has happened in history, particularly when people with wealth and power have caused harm to other human beings. You and I are being called to identify how to communicate that enough is enough in order to put a stop to all manner of violence and destruction happening around us. Together with other Human Beings who share a commitment to demonstrate the wonder and power of a generous and loving Creator, we can take apart systems of interactions which hurt and kill the most vulnerable as well as Mother Earth herself.