

Reflection for Thursday in the First Week after Pentecost June 4, 2020

After Jesus learns that his second cousin John son of Elizabeth and Zechariah had been beheaded, Jesus seeks to get away from the crowds and goes by boat down the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Although Jesus wants to withdraw at this time to grieve, he finds himself once again the midst of a crowd. At this time, more than 5000 men and women and children come out from the cities. In his compassion for those who are sick, Jesus heals them and teaches about the generosity and affection of Creator.

Read Matthew 14:13-21. What catches my attention in this Gospel passage?

Those who follow Jesus face a dilemma. At the end of the day, how are so many going to be fed? Just after my seventh birthday, my father followed a dream of his, taking along his wife and my younger two siblings from a small mining town north of Lake Superior to a rail town in north-eastern Saskatchewan. My father left his job as an electrician and went to work for the Boy Scouts, supporting Scouting organizations across this prairie province and operating a camp in the Qu'Appelle Valley in the summer. In spite of a radical decrease in income, my parents ensured that we had enough for the basics, augmenting the food that we ate by growing gardens each year. However, as a parish priest and then a social worker, I learned that for many children around the world as well as for some in Canada, the supply of nutritious food is not their experience. I have met too many children and youth whose parents have spent money on alcohol or drugs or gambling instead of food and other basics. Graphic pictures of starving children continue to haunt me. As a parent of three adult children, I would have been overwhelmed if my wife and I could not feed our offspring. At times, my wife and I relied on the generosity of my wife's great-aunt and my father-in-law for produce from their respective gardens.

During this pandemic, Indigenous Peoples from coast to coast to coast have wisely closed their communities in order to protect themselves. However, many communities rely on airplanes and boats to bring food to their communities. Some Indigenous leaders have noted that the admonition to go out onto the land and the waters to keep safe and healthy has resulted in more Indigenous Peoples eating better food than what is available at Northern Stores.

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Those followers of Jesus may also have wondered if Jesus was testing them when he pointed out that this huge crowd did not need to leave but these folk could stay and sit on the grasses of the fields. All that the disciples have in hand are five loaves of bread and two fish for more than 5000 people. Jesus does something utterly amazing, **"Jesus took the five loaves of bread, looked up to the heavens, blessed them and broke the loaves apart and gave them to his disciples. Then the disciples gave them to the crowds. Everyone ate until they were full..." Matthew 14:19, 20.** Somehow there was more food than was needed since many more baskets were gathered up to feed others not present in this crowd. I wonder if some stayed overnight under the stars and had enough food for breakfast too.

Read Matthew 14:13-21. What is God saying to us in this passage?

Jesus demonstrates to those who are open to learning that Creator is generous and that people too can be generous.

Traditionally, Indigenous Peoples hunted, herded buffalo over cliffs, trapped a variety of creatures, gathered edible parts of plants, caught fish, harpooned whales, and planted the three sisters (corn, beans, and squash). Food was shared among members of their communities. Complex trade relationships developed to share resources throughout Turtle Island. Creator provided all that Peoples needed. Most years before First Contact were times of abundance as Peoples moved from place to place on their traditional territories. Over thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples grew to know when and where to find food. During times of climate changes, the movement of tectonic plates, cycles in predator and prey relationships, and extra long winters, hunger could force Peoples to move and be creative in the search for food for everyone. Among Anishinaabemowin, visitors passing through their traditional territories were known as Biwida and were treated with respect and honoured as Others with special medicines. More tangible gifts of food and safe places to stay were made available to Biwida. Among the Peoples of the western coast of Turtle Island, the spiritual practices of the potlatch strengthened communities as abundance was shared and the most respected individuals were those who gave out of their abundance to others in the community on a periodic basis. Visitors were showered with gifts but were expected to practice the same generosity as the Secretary of State William Seward learned after he arranged the purchase of Alaska for the United States of America from Russia and was showered with gifts from the Indigenous Peoples of the land but kept those gifts.

Settler Canadians brought practices of ownership of private property and the accumulation of personal wealth to Turtle Island, rooted in practices emphasizing radical individualism and the right to protect one's possessions at all costs. However, other Settlers explored other practices based on meeting the basic needs of every human being, particularly those who are the most vulnerable. Throughout the history of Christianity, communities of faith have been established based on the sharing of all resources for the common good. Movements established by St. Benedict in the 500s and by St. Francis of Assisi in the 1200s both in different parts of Italy called members to practice a spirituality based on prayer, the study of Creator's communications to human beings, and living lives of simplicity in terms of material possessions. In this generation, the Anglican Sisters of St. John the Divine live according to these spiritual practices. During the 1960s and the 1970s, some Churches explored the negative impact of poverty on people's health and well-being. In the 1970s, the Province of Manitoba introduced a universal liveable income for an experimental portion of their population. It is not surprising that people of faith have been thinking, praying, and talking about better ways to address the inequities among different members of society here in Canada. In May 2020, 41 Bishops from the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada as well as the National Indigenous Archbishop sent an open letter to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Finance advocating for the federal government to put a Guaranteed Basic Income in place to benefit everyone from coast to coast to coast. In these days of the Covid-19 pandemic, an exploration of new ways of living together from coast to coast to coast could facilitate healthier and more sustainable relationships here in this part of Turtle Island.

Read Matthew 14:13-21. What is God asking us to be and do?

Jesus trusts the people who have come to seek healing and to learn from his teachings. Jesus demonstrates that Creator is generous and calls us be generous too. Be creative in finding ways to show others about what we know of Creator. Focus on what brings life out of death, light out of darkness, and love out of fear.

Read Rene Meshake's book **INJICHAAG: MY SOUL IN STORY, ANISHINAABE POETICS IN ART AND WORDS**, University of Manitoba Press, 2019. His section about his six years of being homeless in Toronto reveals an interesting application about what he learned from his maternal grandmother and other Elders in surviving his experiences of residential schools and racism in this generation.

Read Nathan Tidridge's book **THE QUEEN AT THE COUNCIL FIRE: THE TREATY OF NIAGARA, RECONCILIATION, AND THE DIGNIFIED CROWN IN CANADA**, Dundurn Press, 2015. As a non-Indigenous high school teacher, his review of the Royal Proclamation in 1763 and the gathering of 24 First Nations on the shores of the Niagara River in 1764 with the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Upper Canada William Johnson explores the basic framework for treaties between Indigenous and Settlers in Canada.