

## Thursday in the Fifth Week of Easter: May 14, 2020

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus continues to teach from the mountain top in Galilee about what it means to open oneself to Creator and live a full life, walking in a good way along the path of life as Creator nourishes us and guides us.

At a storytelling workshop, this passage from Matthew 6: 25-34 was identified by the Instructor for me to memorize and present to the other participants. At that time in my life, I was becoming more anxious and wondered about the direction in which my life was moving. Now, in these extraordinary days, once again, I find myself full of worries. Will my wife of 41 years who has survived three different kinds of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma and three sets of chemotherapies come down with Covid-19? Will any of my three adult children or their partners suffer early deaths during this pandemic or in some future pandemic? When our grandchildren come into this world, will climate changes drastically reduce possibilities for their grandchildren to live on this planet? It is hard not to worry as different parts of Canada open up economically while maintaining the practices of physical distancing, handwashing, and restricting movement by staying home.

### What in this passage catches my attention?

Jesus challenges us to look at the birds in the sky and to ponder how these creatures find enough to eat and drink. We are told to look at the lilies of the field in all their splendour as well as at the grasses waving in the gentle breezes and then to ponder how Creator adorns them so wondrously for their short lives under the sun. His argument and its logic make us want to say, "Of course!!! How could it be otherwise???" Creator provides all that we need to live. My wife and I love this time of year in the northern hemisphere. The urge to be out on the land and to walk along moving water and to feel the freshening breezes is powerful. Settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples find a special sense of peace and vitality in so many sacred places on Mother Earth.

Instead of worrying about what to eat or what to drink or what to wear, Jesus nourishes us with these words: **"...desire first and foremost God's rule and God's righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."** Matthew 6:33.

### What is God saying in this passage?

Anxiety can de-stabilize individuals, harm relationships, and undermine all that communities have accomplished together. Overwhelming anxiety propels people to say things and behave in ways that hurt ourselves and others near to us. On the other hand, anxiety can also be positive. Being aware of danger helps us to reduce risk of harm and take action to survive. A little anxiety enhances performance. Healthy anxiety can enable people to plan to prevent disaster from happening in the future.

It is tempting to understand this passage from a Eurocentric perspective, focusing on the individual and his or her relationship with Creator. From this framework, each individual seeks Creator privately and opens themselves to learn about Creator's perspective on what it means to be in right relationships.

However, from an Indigenous perspective the starting point is very different. Indigenous Peoples focus on the health and well-being of the whole People in relationship to Creator and learn about the generosity of Creator in providing for everyone. Each person belongs in an intricate web of relationships and has a role to play in ensuring that the needs of everyone are met.

It is fascinating to understand the meaning of names of Indigenous People. Through the Indian Agent and those who worked in Residential Schools, anglicized names were given to individuals. Among the traditional Anishinaabemowin, each one had a single, distinct, given name received through a Naming Ceremony with an Elder. This name was a description of the person's character and represented that person's unique role in their Clan and their People. Rene Andre Meshake was born in 1948 in Oongona Gaming north of Geraldton, Ontario. On a family tree going back to 1834, this Rene Meshake discovered that his paternal grandfather was named Mishakigishig, that is Misha (hover over and descend) aki (earth) gishig (sky). At the birth of the paternal grandfather, the Elder who was given tobacco and had a vision of a damselfly, metallic green, long and lean, hovering, descending over the waters and among the reeds gave him this name to journey through the heart of his community. Later this name was anglicized to be Meshake. Other ceremonies throughout life acknowledged the ongoing presence of Creator and the importance of the particular individual's giftedness in relation to others. Children watched older members of their family or Clan or People to learn how to provide for everyone. For a boy, the acknowledgement by other boys and older men of a first catch or a successful hunt meant a great deal. Prayers to Creator and gifts of tobacco were offered by others at a fishing spot or out on a hunt. Afterwards, more prayers and gifts of tobacco were offered in thanksgiving for the particular fish or animal or bird which would be shared with others. An uncle left out his tools so Rene Meshake could pick them up and do what his uncle was doing in building a birch bark canoe. When boys and men returned from extended hunting expeditions, the whole community celebrated for a number of days and nights. Each member of the Indigenous People lived into their Spirit Name, becoming known by their unique contributions to meet the needs of the whole People. In seeking Creator, Indigenous People improve the quality of life for others by following the path guided by Creator, taking what they need and making sure that others also have what they need too.

### **What is God asking us to be and to do?**

Creator draws people together into complex relationship. Creator invites each of us to open ourselves so that we look and listen to both Settler Canadians and Indigenous Peoples as we all take the gifts which Creator offers for our daily survival. Creator invites all of us to understand what it means to be in right relationships in caring for Mother Earth together so that generations to come can also enjoy Creator's generosity.

Read Rene Meshake's book *INJICHAAG: MY SOUL IN STORY* (University of Manitoba Press 2019) and learn about his healing journey as an Anishinaabemowin from north of Lake Superior becoming an artist, musician, and storyteller. Watch Elder Kohontokwas Diane Longboat from Six Nations on RED TABLE WISDOM TALKS on virtual gatherings with the ZOOM platform on Thursdays at 8 pm through a no cost subscription for Reach Yoga Lifestyles in Hamilton.