

Thursday in the Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost: November 12, 2020

On the journey towards Jerusalem, Jesus heals the afflicted and teaches about the generosity of Creator and the Great Spirit, challenging the crowds to open themselves to live life in new ways for the sake of others.

Read Luke 15:1,2,11-32. What catches my attention about this gospel reading?

Jesus welcomes the tax collectors and sinners, sitting down to eat with them and learn about their lives. As the religious and political leaders watch what Jesus is doing and listens to what he is saying, their frustration grows so they grumble. Their anger builds. Their plotting to do Jesus harm escalates. Jesus responds by teachings about the elderly woman who lost a valuable coin and the shepherd who lost a sheep. Jesus uses a third parable to challenge these ravenous lions, raising a question about which sibling deserves to inherit the estate of their parents....a story about a child who is lost.

Seeking independence, a child asks for their portion of their inheritance, receives their gift, leaves the community in which the child was raised, and travels to a foreign country. Like many who leave behind those whom have shaped their identity since birth, this child attempts to begin a new life among new people in a strange land. It is not surprising that this child discovers quickly about being truly lost. Many take advantage of the child's wealth. When the money is gone and constant hunger becomes an everyday reality, this lost child learns that no one cares among the people in this strange, new land. A revelation emerges, giving light to a path to health. This child realizes that his parents' value honest, hard work from the labourers in the fields and concludes that work might to one who could provide such labour. Food, safe water, clothing, and adequate housing might be available at the end of the journey to safety and wholeness. It takes courage to walk towards the possibility of new life. Every step of the way raises doubts and yet strengthens hope, not necessarily at the same time.

It is not surprising that the sibling who remains at home, working the fields and tending the animals, reacts with frustration and anger. The one who stays on the farm discovers that their parents not only welcome the long, lost sibling back but put together a celebration. New clothing and sturdy sandals are provided. More bread is baked. A family ring is given. A fatted calf is prepared and roasted for all to eat. Lots of fresh water and good wine is readied to pour. Much music and dancing will happen as the whole community celebrates. The sibling who faithfully contributed to the ongoing prosperity of the parent's farm struggles with feelings of entitlement, demonstrating an understanding of justice which protects property and accumulated wealth. This sibling refuses to celebrate and maintains that the sibling who returns seeks to steal more of the inheritance which their parents have accumulated.

The parents know each of their children well. The parents plead with their child who struggles to accept the work of their sibling's journey to health and well-being. The parents fear that their child who had worked the land and tended the animals faithfully may not realize how lost that they had become while their sibling had been away in a strange and foreign land. The parents do communicate to this child the importance of celebrating the profound change made by the sibling who had been lost and now found themselves living a new life.

Reread Luke 15:1,2,11-32. What is God saying in this gospel story?

For Indigenous Peoples, this gospel story is much more complicated. In making agreements and treaties with Settlers and their governments, Indigenous Peoples shared the land and waters for which they had been caretakers for thousands of years. Indigenous Peoples believed that their way of life was going to be protected so that their language as well as their cultural and spiritual heritage would be handed down to their children, their grandchildren, and their descendants “as long as the sun shines and the grasses grow”. Indigenous Peoples also believed that Settlers and their governments would assist them in continuing to be able to provide all that sustains human life and transition towards learning new ways of living in a much larger world than what they had known on Turtle Island. Indigenous Peoples shared their inheritance from Creator and the Great Spirit with Settlers and their governments. It is Settlers and their governments who are being challenged to care for the land and waters as gifts from Creator and the Great Spirit so that generations in the future may benefit from all that comes from the earth, the waters, and the air.

As a result of the policies and practices of Settlers and their governments, Indigenous Peoples have suffered much. For Neskantaga First Nation, much of the community has been evacuated to Thunder Bay, waiting for their water treatment plant to work and provide safe, clean water to their homes as well as to their school, health centre, and band offices. Construction at this water treatment plant began in 2016 and has yet to be fully completed. Further work needs to be started in getting water from the water treatment plant out into the community. The wastewater system also needs to be improved and made operational. The evacuees have begun to protest the length of time for the federal government to resolve these problems, reminding Settlers about their right to have safe, clean water in their homes as it is for the residents of Thunder Bay and every Canadian.

As a gathering of non-Indigenous Anglicans brought together by the National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald, Pimatisiwin Nipi supports Chief Chris Moonais and Council for Neskantaga FN in their efforts to obtain safe, clean water in way that builds capacity in their community in their working relationships with the federal government. In the past, Pimatisiwin Nipi worked with Chief Dean Owen and Council in the installation of water tanks and wastewater tanks in the homes of the most vulnerable in Pikangikum FN. For fundraising in Advent 2020, Pimatisiwin Nipi plans to seek donations for supporting Indigenous young people in internship programs in drinking water treatment and environmental water management provided through WATER FIRST EDUCATION AND TRAINING. Pimatisiwin Nipi learned that WATER FIRST established an Indigenous Advisory Council to build relationships with First Nations leadership, seeking partnerships in identifying young adults for a fifteen-month long training program and then providing these interns with access to their water treatment plants. Building trust is considered paramount between WATER FIRST and Indigenous communities. For the first project beginning in 2018, 10 young people were identified by seven First Nations on Manitoulin Island. The first six months involved developing the knowledge base of their interns in water management. The last nine months were spent in their respective communities as interns working in the water treatment plants. Of the 10 interns, 1 went on to post-secondary education expanding their knowledge of water management while 8 other interns remained in their respective Indigenous communities applying the knowledge and skills which they had learned. The second project began in

February 2020 with Indigenous communities with Bimose Tribal Council in northwestern Ontario. 18 interns were recruited from eleven participating FN communities. The Bimose Tribal Council sought to have more trained young people developing the knowledge and skills as Water Quality Analysts and Water Treatment Operators. Adaptations have been made to the internship program in order to keep young people as well as their teachers and mentors safe with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic. A third project will train interns from Indigenous communities along the eastern shores of Georgian Bay. Pimatisiwin Nipi plans to meet this week in order to finalize plans for our Advent fundraising activities.

Reread Luke 15:1,2, 11-32. What is God calling us to be and do?

View a playlist of 9 videos on ABOUT THE WATER FIRST INTERNSHIP PROGRAM at the WATER FIRST NGO website to gain information about this internship program and to be introduced to a number of young interns. Pray for those who have lost their way. Search for those who seek to connect with Creator and the Great Spirit in order to journey forward in appreciating the land and waters entrusted into the care of all human beings. Consider making donations so that Indigenous communities can have safe, clean water in their homes as well as in their schools, health centres, and governance facilities.

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