

Thursday in the Week after the Reign of Christ: November 26, 2020

Getting closer to Jerusalem, Jesus stops in Jericho and meets the Chief Tax Collector Zacchaeus for the nation, a very wealthy man with authority over a great many who are not beloved by the crowds. The crowds grumble that Jesus talks to this man and blesses not only Zacchaeus but all of his household.

Read Luke 19:11-27. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

Jesus tells a parable to those gathered to listen to him and watch what he does. The crowds have heard this parable many times in a variety of contexts so they are aware of its characters and its short plotline. The crowds know how the world works under Roman rule. In order to rule over a people living anywhere in the Roman Empire, this man needed to travel to Rome with his entourage and many valuable gifts to offer to the Roman Emperor. If these gifts and the man's speeches met the approval of the Roman Emperor, then the man was appointed, having agreed to all of the terms spelled out by the Caesar in power at that time. So it would come to pass that the people would not only have to pay taxes to their local Ruler but the people would take on the extra levies demanded of the current Roman Emperor. It is not surprising that the local populace did not like what was happening and planted seeds of sedition wherever they could. Their delegation to call back their Ruler fails as their Ruler persists in his journey to Rome.

With the full authority of the Roman Emperor, the Ruler returns and holds to account the ten Stewards who had received different amounts of goods and money in order to know how his investments had fared in his absence. Each Steward is rewarded according to what each Steward gained with the gifts which had been freely given to them. For some, the original capital was turned into large profits. For others, the returns on the investments were much more modest. For one Steward, there was no return since this Steward played it safe and held onto the goods and money without engaging in the marketplace. The crowds understood this parable. Those who owned a portion of the Promised Land or operated a successful business know how the economy works and how political authority plays out in the day to day running of their business. The consequences of refusing to go along with how business is conducted in the world are dire. The listening crowds would have no difficulty identifying with the injustice perpetrated by the returning Ruler who takes away not only his original investment of goods and money but takes away everything the fearful Steward possesses and gives everything to the most productive Steward.

To end this parable, Jesus says that the Ruler sends out Enforcers to gather up those who met with him on the journey to Rome and tried to convince the Ruler to return without making a political and economic treaty with the Roman Emperor. For their rebellion against Rome, the Ruler is very harsh. The Ruler commands the Enforcers to gather these seditious people together and slaughter them. Some might argue that the rebellious reap what they sown. Others might be horrified, wondering what would happen to the widows and children of the rebellious men who were slaughtered. Many would be aghast at the death and destruction in this parable initiated by the Ruler's command. This gospel reading is very difficult for those who know a Creator who provides all that we need, demonstrates compassion, forgives those who repent of the harm which we have caused, frees human beings from oppression, and brings healing to those who suffer. Unlike other passages, Jesus does not provide a quick summary to open our eyes and ears to understand the meaning of this parable. We are left dangling, wondering what will happen next.

Reread Luke 19:11-27. What is God saying in this passage?

Jesus clearly communicates how the world works, teaching about how the wealthy and those in political authority reward those who accept the resultant arrangement of power and rain destruction down on those who live by different ideas and values. Instead of using words to teach, Jesus takes up a different mode in teaching the crowds what he means. Jesus will show the crowds how Creator and Great Spirit exercise authority in the world. By his actions, Jesus will reveal how Creator and Great Spirit expect human beings to live in this world at this time.

In June 2014, a new creation came into being in the Anglican Church of Canada. Archdeacon Lydia Mamakwa from St. Matthew's Church in Kingfisher Lake First Nation was consecrated Bishop of the Indigenous Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh. In Oji-Cree, Mishamikoweesh means "Big Beaver House". Kingfisher Lake is 500 km north of Thunder Bay and 350 km northwest of the road which ends in Sioux Lookout. In the months of February and March, bulk fuel, building supplies, and other supplies are brought into these communities by ice roads. Kingfisher Lake FN is a fly-in community like the other 16 Indigenous communities in northwestern Ontario and northeastern Manitoba who live in Mishamikoweesh. The consecration of Bishop Mamakwa came into being in the dreams of Elders and decades of conversations with non-Indigenous Anglicans in Canada. Bishop Mamakwa serves communities in which Ojibwa and Oji-Cree are the first languages of its members. Their spiritual practices connect these Indigenous Peoples to the ongoing care for the lands and waters of their traditional territories in that part of Turtle Island. At her Consecration, the former Primate Fred Hiltz identified Bishop Mamakwa as "a woman of great compassion" and told those gathered in this Sacred Circle "see has a heart for you---for your delights and your struggles, your joys and your sorrows, your sufferings and your hopes". The National Indigenous Bishop now Archbishop Mark MacDonald pointed out that God had been working in the lives of Indigenous Peoples across the North, noting "God moved in people's hearts at the same time in many places in many different ways". Archbishop MacDonald also acknowledged that former Primate Michael Peers listened to the stories of members of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples about the harm experienced in residential schools from coast to coast and then offered a public apology for the involvement of the Anglican Church of Canada in the policies and practices of assimilation and what is now understood to be cultural genocide. Bishop Mamakwa continues to be concerned about the living conditions of the Indigenous People in her episcopal area. In a letter to Trinity Anglican Church in Aurora for the Reign of Christ in November 2020, Bishop Mamakwa expressed her appreciation of the non-Indigenous Anglicans gathered together by Archbishop MacDonald as Pimatisiwin Nipi to bring safe, clean water to the most vulnerable in Pikangikum First Nation in the past decade. Bishop Mamakwa wrote about the devastating impact of youth suicides and the role of the worshipping communities to mourn with those experiencing these losses. After finishing Grade 8, youth leave their families and communities to pursue further education, living with strangers who provide room and board for them. The two Indigenous high schools in the nearest urban centres are not enough for all of the students who want to go to high school. Experiences of culture shock are difficult for these youth. Being more or less on their own away from family and their communities also adds to the challenges facing these students. Bishop Mamakwa identified a third critical issue facing First Nations in that part of Turtle Island. A housing shortage means that for most families 10 or more live together in a three-bedroom house. Young parents have increased the number of children, putting a strain not only on the supply of adequate housing but on the schools and health centres too. Kingfisher Lake FN alone has 100 people on a wait list for housing. During this

pandemic, when people return from the south for health reasons, there are no facilities for them to quarantine. As a result, returning people and their whole household need to quarantine. Covid-19 tests have to be flown to health centres and the results take time to be made known. Bishop Mamakwa noted that “isolation centres” would be helpful and supportive to those needing to quarantine. Bishop Mamakwa also noted that while most First Nations have a water treatment plant, difficulties exist in the distribution of safe, clean water to homes, particularly during the harsh cold winter months. Some homes are not connected to the water system. Most First Nations have a shortage of trucks to haul clean, safe water to homes and of more trucks to take wastewater away. Bishop Mamakwa noted that the Peoples of Mishamikoweesh stand in solidarity with Neskantaga FN who have difficulties with their newly constructed water treatment plant and evacuated most of their community to Thunder Bay since safe, clean water was not available to their homes. Bishop Mamakwa expressed her appreciation for Archbishop Mark MacDonald and Pimatisiwin Nipi for their ongoing support for Pikangikum FN over the years in bringing safe, clean water to the most vulnerable of their community over the years.

According to the Director of Housing and Infrastructure for Nishnawbe Aski Nation Mike McKay, issues around the supply of spare parts are also problematic in remote areas, particularly since many of the water treatment plants were constructed in the 1990s. Training in water management as well as in the maintenance and repair of the community water system are also needed among a larger number of water management operators.

In their vibrant relationship with Creator, Eternal Word, and Gchi Minidoo, Indigenous Anglicans seek to determine their own direction as part of the Anglican Church of Canada. Bishop Mamakwa noted that in moving into the Advent season, a sense of anticipation takes root and grows. Memories from times of preparation in the past with Elders and hopes for the future flourish. We too can feel joy in knowing that Jesus made a way for all human beings to become part of a new creation demonstrating the reign of Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit in our lives while we walk and dance on this earth.

Reread Luke 19: 11-27. What is God asking us to be and do?

In your preparations to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus, spend less and give more. Consider the request from Archbishop Mark MacDonald and Pimatisiwin Nipi to make a donation to your church for INDIGENOUS WATER PROGRAMS so that your church can forward your gifts to the Primates World Relief and Development Fund for distribution this year to WATER FIRST. Since WATER FIRST has an Indigenous Advisory Council and works collaboratively with Indigenous leadership, Pimatisiwin Nipi supports their Internship Program. Over 15 months, interns are trained and mentored in drinking water analysis and environmental water management. This year, WATER FIRST will recruit and begin internships for young Indigenous adults from three Tribal Councils along the eastern shores of Georgian Bay. For those with Facebook accounts, search for Pimatisiwin Nipi to be kept up to date with pictures and information about the Advent Conspiracy campaign for this year. Continue to pray for Neskantaga First Nation, particularly for the evacuees who are now in Thunder Bay and those who are providing tangible support for them.

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