

## Thursday in Easter Week: April 8, 2021

### Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

After his last meal with those closest to him, Jesus gets up from the table, sets aside his outer clothing, ties a towel around his waist, and begins to wash the feet of all who are gathered in that upper room. Jesus shows his followers how to provide leadership in the world. Jesus seizes the moment to teach plainly about what it means to walk in his footsteps after witnessing his death, scattering in the city of Jerusalem and into the surrounding countryside, and then learning that Jesus had been raised from the dead by the Source of All Life and Love.

### Read John 15:12-27. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

Those who were closest to Jesus could remember some of his teachings and did remember what he said as time moved forward. During their last meal together, Jesus left them with these words, **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”** John 15:12, 13, 14. Jesus points out that a unique relationship had developed between himself and those who opened themselves to listen to his teachings and to watch him bring healing to so many. Like the relationship which Jesus maintained between himself and the Source of All Life and Love, Jesus made it plain that the same relationship was in place between himself and those who put his teachings into practice. There is affection and intimacy in this relationship. Friends care for each other. Friends seek opportunities to spend time with each other. Friends listen. Friends take action to demonstrate their appreciation for the other person’s strengths and gifts. Friends delight in the accomplishments of each other, celebrating what is good and right and life-giving. Friends share each other’s sorrows and pain. Friends also provide direction and support during times of trial and tribulation. Jesus was able to walk the way of the cross because of the relationship which he maintained with the Source of All Life and Love. Jesus sends those closest to him out into the world providing the affection and means to survive. Jesus points out that some human beings protected their power and privilege instead of accepting the friendship which he offered them during his life on this planet. Jesus also acknowledges that those who enter into a relationship with him and with the Source of All Life and Love will also encounter human beings who will also plan to do harm to them too. In every generation, there are those who protect their power, wealth, and privilege at all cost. In this way, Jesus prepares people to walk the way of the cross too. For those who seek to put his teachings into practice, Jesus invites these human beings into a full, vibrant, and creative relationship with the One who sent him into the world. Jesus also promises that Creator and he himself will send a Helper to accompany and uphold all who seek to walk in the light of truth. This walk is not a journey of individuals moving forward alone but a journey with many, many other human beings bound together by a common openness in belonging to and finding meaning in an awesome relationship with Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit.

### Reread John 15:12-27. What is God saying in this passage?

For the final Lenten Talking Circles hosted by the Anglican parish of All Saints King City, another three articles were selected from **QUEST FOR RESPECT: THE CHURCH AND INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY (INTOTEMAK, Mennonite Church Canada, 2017)** exploring possibilities for reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and Settler Canadians.

In his article **Being Spiritual Before A Common Creator**, the Mi'kmaq Knowledge Keeper and Acadian Terry Leblanc shares his understanding about the significance of spirituality among Indigenous Peoples. As a founding Chair and Director of NAIITS (North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies): An Indigenous Learning Community, Dr. Leblanc builds capacity among Indigenous Peoples. Dr. Leblanc points out that for many people, spirituality is like the experience of holding water in one's cupped hands. For a moment, the senses tell us what happened as the water drains away and then is replaced by a memory which grows faint over time. In telling others about one's spiritual experiences, Dr. Leblanc also notes that often this experience is like that of Neil Armstrong speaking about what it was like walking on the moon since only two others have taken these steps. For Indigenous Peoples, there is common agreement that spirituality not only permeates the human community but that all that exists in creation is spiritual. In reference to the Apostle Paul in his address to the Athenians in the Acts of the Apostles, Dr. Leblanc maintains that Human Beings seek to understand God and experience what it means to find oneself immersed in the presence of Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit. In reference to the Creation Story in the Hebrew Scriptures, Dr. Leblanc points out that Human Beings were created in the image and likeness of God so that spirituality is an innate quality of being human. Dr. Leblanc also reviewed some differences among Christian theological perspectives as well as those among Elders in Indigenous communities, illustrating significant perspectives informing spiritual practices for which there is no commonalities. In conclusion, Dr. Leblanc notes that Human Beings share a common Creator who is known by different names and that respect for different beliefs and spiritual practices needs to happen without any application of a hierarchical ranking framework.

In their article **HIDDEN TRUTHS: LEARNING FROM THE LAND AND EACH OTHER**, the Water and Land Defender from Shoal Lake #40 First Nation Angelina McLeod and Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies at Menno Simons College in Winnipeg Jobb Arnold collaborated and wrote about the need for Canadian Settlers and Indigenous Peoples to know what happened in the foundation and development of Canada on Turtle Island. A brief history of the colonization reviews the destructive impact of an unequal power relationship and a genocidal framework towards diverse and complex Indigenous Peoples and their traditional teachings and spiritual practices. Both Angelina McLeod and Dr. Arnold participated in learning community from Shoal Lake #40 First Nation, Settler Canadians, and Newcomers brought together by Indigenous leadership on the land and waters of Shoal Lake to experience Anishinaabe teachings and protocols. Hard truths about historic injustices, ongoing exploitation, and persistent despair were explored. Hidden truths about the efforts by Indigenous Peoples to maintain an understanding of the sacredness within and between peoples, places, plants, living creatures, and the materials of creation. These relationships form the basis of a mutual interdependence that is not only good but a matter of our collective survival on this planet. Angelina McLeod and Dr. Arnold explained how colonial fictions based on the conviction of Europeans that the Americas were empty, unoccupied, or did not belong to anybody (*terra nullius*) and that these undiscovered lands were given to European

Settlers by God (Doctrine of Discovery) also portrayed Indigenous Peoples as savages who needed to be converted to Christianity and civilized. These colonial fictions also justified the seizure of land and exploitation of resources from these lands and waters. In 1913, the expanding city of Winnipeg began making plans for a viaduct to bring drinking water from the Lake of the Woods watershed around Shoal Lake near the border between Manitoban and Ontario. Legislation was passed by the provincial governments in Manitoba and Ontario as well by the federal government without consultation with the Indigenous Peoples of this area in order to build this viaduct over an ancestral burial ground and to displace a village moving its people onto a man-made island in Shoal Lake. As a result, fresh, clean water was brought westward to the city of Winnipeg while Shoal Lake #40 First Nation became isolated. Over the years, thin ice resulted in the deaths of residents attempting to get groceries and supplies. Health care has been difficult to obtain. Safe and adequate housing continues to be an issue. The need to send teenagers to urban centres like Kenora for high school also continues to put youth at risk. Since 1997, Shoal Lake #40 First Nation has been under a boil-water advisory so skin rashes and medical issues have been problematic particularly for young children and the elderly. Angelina McLeod points out that the acknowledgement of the hardships endured by the members of Shoal Lake #40 First Nation by Settler Canadians and the efforts of allies in supporting Indigenous leadership to obtain resources to address these longstanding inequities have generated hope among youth. The reclamation of Indigenous knowledge, traditional cultural teachings, and spiritual practices have made Angelina McLeod strong and proud about her Anishinaabe ancestry. Since the publication of this article, Angelina McLeod has become known also as a filmmaker in making a documentary **FREEDOM ROAD** about the leadership of Elders in engaging the community and establishing relationships with non-Indigenous allies to build a 24-kilometre road from the Trans-Canada Highway to a bridge finally connecting the village on the man-made island in Shoal Lake with the outside world. This road was completed in June 2019. In September 2019, the construction of a water treatment plant and a new school was begun.

In his article **BACK TO THE WOMB: A CONVERSATION AT TURTLE LODGE**, Nii Gooni Akiinini (Leading Earth Man) Dave Courchene Jr. shares his journey in establishing Turtle Lodge on the traditional territories of Sakgeeng First Nation in Manitoba. At the time of his birth, the Indian Agent maintained authority over each First Nation in day-to-day life, missionaries-imposed Christianity on Indigenous communities, and residential schools erased the use of Indigenous languages, cultural teachings, spiritual practices, and traditional ceremonies. However, as a young child, Dave Courchene Jr. spent time among the trees out on the land developing a love for all that had been created. His father kept him from attending residential school and became a role model for him. His great-grandfather and his grandfather provided leadership as Chiefs in their respective generations. His father became the Grand Chief for the Province of Manitoba. Dave Courchene Jr. was also introduced to other prominent Indigenous leaders who made significant contributions to the political movement in identifying injustices inflicted on Indigenous Peoples in the founding and development of Canada. As he listened and saw for himself these injustices, Dave Courchene Jr. became angry and grew angrier about the dehumanization arising from Canada's Indian Act 1876 and its subsequent revisions. His father and his father's friends supported the resurgence of languages, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices promoting identity reclamation and self-determination. In his early 20's, Dave Courchene Jr. left their traditional territories and sought other Elders from different Indigenous communities, visiting their lodges and engaging in

their teachings. One of these elders pointed out that the old people were saying, “That is who you and your ancestors are...you are a people of kindness.” This teaching began to dissipate his anger. Among the Dakota Peoples, the grandmothers identified the anger inside him and provided teachings about how “this spot of darkness” in his heart would cause others and himself pain. The grandmothers also introduced him to a spiritual practice to take him back to the beginnings of his life inside the womb of his mother hearing her heartbeat and being nourished in the heat of her body. In his experiences in sweat lodges, Dave Courchene Jr. discovered that he belonged and began his spiritual journey. He participated in sun dances in the heat of the summer and was drawn to the sound of drumming well after the sun dancing had stopped. He began to experience visions and searched for their meaning. In going back to the beginning, Dave Courchene Jr. discovered his gifts, his spiritual identity, and what he was supposed to do to fulfil the visions provided by Creator and Great Spirit. In his journey, Dave Courchene Jr. established Turtle Lodge where youth could come to engage the Elders and their teachings as well as to celebrate rites of passage through ceremonies. For Dave Courchene Jr., these spiritual practices nourish participants in preparation to become strong and healthy parents. With this framework, there is no acceptance for the imposition of beliefs and spiritual practices on others. With humour, Dave Courchene Jr. speculates about what might have happened if a First Peoples Immigration Department asked newcomers the following questions upon arrival on Turtle Island: Will you follow the rules and protocols of being in our homelands? Will you respect all Peoples? Will you take care of the land like we take care of the land? With humour, he wondered about the scenario in which a First Nations Immigration Department returned immigrants back to their countries of origin for non-compliance. Dave Courchene Jr. concluded by inviting non-Indigenous Canadians to Turtle to benefit from Indigenous teachings and to participate in ceremonies.

**Reread John 15:12-27. What is God calling us to be and do?**

Be open to explore what others may teach us in the human search for the Source of All Life and Love. Seek opportunities to affirm in tangible ways those who experience injustices in their daily lives. Give thanks for the many ways in which Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit continue to be generous to each and every Human Being, including you and I.

David Franks