

## Thursday in the Third Week of Epiphany: January 28, 2021

Jesus continues to teach and heal in the villages near the Sea of Galilee. As a new initiative, Jesus sends those closest to him out in pairs to do the same. The twelve were instructed to take only a walking stick so that each pair would need to eat and drink and find safe places to sleep according to the generosity of the villagers. Jesus learns that John the Baptizer is beheaded and that John's disciples took his body from the prison where he was being held by Herod Antipas to lay it in a tomb.

### Read Mark 6:30-44. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?

Jesus listens to the twelve as they speak about what they learned in the task of teaching and healing in the villages. Afterwards, Jesus directs the twelve to accompany him in a boat to find a place to rest from their labours. Often after an intense learning period and opportunity to process their new learnings with others, keen learners benefit from rest and quiet to further reflect on their own experiences and integrate what their colleagues have learned too.

However, the villagers want to learn more and recognize who is aboard that small fishing vessel. With enthusiasm, the crowds guess where Jesus and the twelve will land, arriving by foot ahead of them. There will be no rest for the weary.

Jesus arrives at his destination only to find a huge crowd waiting for him and the twelve. Jesus gazes upon the people and immediately is filled with compassion, recognizing their need for someone who would care for them as a shepherd tends their flock. Jesus reads the crowd and knows what it is for which they yearn so desperately. So Jesus begins to teach them.

With the twelve, Jesus is playful.

The twelve point out that the crowd met them in a desolate place and that the day is quickly coming to an end. People are getting hungry. For those closest to Jesus, the solution is evident. Jesus is asked to send the crowds into the nearby villages to find food for themselves before night comes fully. The twelve tell Jesus that they do not have the money to feed all of the people who have been listening so ardently.

Jesus sees the crowds in a very different light than those who are closest to him.

Jesus tells the twelve to find out what food they have among them so the twelve search and discover that between them, they have five loaves of bread and two small fish.

Jesus tells the twelve to get the crowds seated in groups on the green grass on the hillside.

Jesus takes the five loaves and two fish, looks to Creator and Great Spirit, and then blesses these gifts of food. The twelve set before the crowds these broken pieces of bread and fish. **"And all ate and were filled." Mark 6:42.** At the end of the day, Jesus sends the twelve to collect whatever is leftover after the 5000 have been satisfied. In this last task of the day, Jesus teaches the twelve to appreciate the generosity of those who are yearning to be fed more than just food for their physical bodies.

## **Reread Mark 6:30-44. What is God saying to us?**

When Robin Wall Kimmerer goes out into the forest, she listens as a professor of botany and as a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation from Oklahoma. As a scientist, she learned to identify plants by their Latin names and categories, to separate plants according to physical characteristics, to atomize complexity into its smallest components, to honour the chain of evidence and western notions of logic, and to savour the pleasure of precision. Science is rigorous in separating the observer from the observed and then keeping the observed separate from the observer. As a student, Dr. Kimmerer was fascinated learning about natural chemical interactions and processes discovered through scientific research. However, in completing an undergraduate program in botany and then taking graduate studies, Dr. Kimmerer had to set aside what she learned about plants in growing up in an Indigenous home in upstate New York. As a child, she had shoeboxes of seeds and piles of pressed leaves under her bed. While riding her bicycle, she would stop when she identified a new species. Plants coloured her dreams. She noted the habitats which favoured particular plants. She applied to university to find out why goldenrods and asters looked so beautiful growing together in September. Each spring as a child, she would lie on her stomach in strawberry patches to closely watch these plants grow first producing small white berries and then ripe red fruit. Over fifty Strawberry Moons, when Dr. Kimmerer finds a new patch of wild strawberries, she still experiences a sensation of surprise, feelings of unworthiness and gratitude for the generosity and kindness of being given such a gift wrapped up in red and green. In graduate school in Wisconsin, she and her husband worked as caretakers for the university arboretum. One night, she and her husband investigated why a light had been left on in the botanical garage. On a bulletin board, she discovered a news clipping with a photograph of an immense American elm which had been identified as the champion of its species, the largest of its kind. The tree was named the Louis Vicus Elm. Remembering stories from her childhood, she identified that the tree was named after her grandfather. On another photograph in that news clipping, the face of her grandfather looked at her. She knew that the bones of her Potawatomi grandfather and her grandmother Sha-note were buried under that tree. Her journey back to her Indigenous heritage became a winding path. Dr. Kimmerer received an invitation to a gathering of Indigenous Elders who planned to talk about their traditional knowledge of plants. A Navajo woman without a university education spoke for hours about the plants which grew in the valley in which she lived. This Elder identified plants one by one giving them names known to her People. This Elder recounted where each plant lived when it bloomed, who the plant liked to live nearby, all of the plant's relationships, which creatures ate that plant, which birds lined their nest with the plant's fibre, and what kind of medicine the plant offered human beings. Dr. Kimmerer also travelled to Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Oklahoma where she was introduced to the last nine fluent speakers of her People's form of Anishinaabemowin. In residential schools, children and youth were not permitted to speak their language. Punishments ensued when Indigenous words were heard. Yet, these nine elderly Potawatomi knowledge keepers sought many ways to teach what they knew. Dr. Kimmerer learned vocabulary through a twice weekly lunch language class, beginning at 12:15 pm Oklahoma time. After some months, Dr. Kimmerer began speaking like a kindergarten student as she learned words common to household items and activities. She attempted to learn the names of the plants in Anishinaabemowin to share with her students. But unlike English, in Anishinaabemowin, 70 % of words are verbs not nouns. In English, a "bay" is a place. The word is inanimate. In Anishinaabemowin, the

word is a verb “to be a bay”. For Dr. Kimmerer, an epiphany took place. She could smell the water. She could watch the water rock against the shoreline. She could hear the water draw back on the sand. “To be a bay” fills the mind and heart with wonder to think that the living water has decided to be sheltered between shores, communicating with the roots of trees growing nearby as well as any birds, fish, plants, or other creatures on or in those living waters. Anishinaabemowin is based on a grammar of animacy, indicating a pulse of life flowing through all creation. The root of the Anishinaabemowin verb then has many variations to give meaning to many different states, conditions, and time related characteristics. Plants and animals are animate. But Anishinaabemowin diverges from the list of attributes of living beings which students learn in basic biology. Rocks and mountains are animate just as water and fire and places are animate. All are beings with spirit, songs to sing, stories to tell, medicine to offer, and various purposes in creation for other beings. Anishinaabemowin reminds Indigenous Peoples in every sentence about a myriad of kinship relationships not found in the English language nor western science.

Somehow missionaries, ordinary Settlers, and members of various levels of government undermined the spiritual understanding which Indigenous Peoples of Mother Earth, Grandfather Sun, and Grandmother Moon. It is clear to me that Jesus recognizes the spiritual yearnings of Indigenous Peoples and asks you and I to lay out what food that we have in order to feast together in the generosity and love of Creator and Great Spirit.

**Reread Mark 6:30-44. What is God saying for us to be and do?**

Read **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS** by Robin Wall Kimmerer (Milkweed Editions, Canada, 2013). Her clarity in her storytelling helps to understand the teachings from plants and animals for all human beings from both a western scientific framework and the spiritual perspective of Indigenous knowledge.

Explore ways in which Creator, Eternal Word, and Great Spirit see and hear Indigenous Peoples of different languages and from various parts of Mother Earth understand the gifts provided by Creator and Great Spirit to survive.

Be filled with awe at the generosity of the Source of All Life wherever we discover these gifts.