

ASCENSION DAY: May 13, 2021

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

In the Matthean Gospel, the sun begins to rise and two of the women who have listened to his teachings and have watched him heal many different people arrive at the tomb where the Crucified Jesus had been laid on the previous day. These two women discover that the huge stone which had been rolled in front of the tomb had been rolled aside. A figure dressed in dazzling white robes greets them, tells them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and then showed them the empty tomb. This angel sends both women to tell the other disciples what they had witnessed. Along their way, the Risen Jesus appears before them, speaks words of reassurance, and gives them a message to tell the other disciples about where to go to meet him.

Read Matthew 28:16-20. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

In following the directions given to the two women, the eleven men who had been closest to Jesus for three very full years journey to the Sea of Galilee and climb the mountain not far from the shoreline. Some are filled with a profound sense of awe when the Risen Jesus appears in front of them. Some wonder who this apparition might be and struggle to accept his identity. In the Matthean gospel, there are not a host of stories recounting a number of appearances of the Risen Jesus to those closest to him at the tomb or in the Upper Room or on a walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus or on the hillside near Bethany or at a cooking fire on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The Risen Jesus only appears twice to a total of thirteen people.

The Risen Jesus does remind the eleven men that all authority had been given to him by Creator and Great Spirit...the Source of All Life and Love. The Risen Jesus claims to exercise incredible power within time and space as well as beyond the beings and elements of this creation. The Risen Jesus lives among all Peoples, Those-who-have-inhabited-this-creation-in-the-past and Those-who-need-the-resources of this planet-to-survive-in-the-present and Those-who-have-yet-to-come-into-being-in-the-future.

Among the multitudes of Human Beings scattered across the planet, a small number are given a monumental task. The Risen Jesus says, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19,20.** On a mountainside overlooking the Sea of Galilee, a small number start the work of taking good news to all and this work continues today.

The Risen Jesus also promises to accompany this small gathering during this journey moving forward. With all of the authority and power of a Co-Creator, the Risen Jesus will give direction, provide inspiration during difficult times, and nourish each and every learner on every step along the way until every Human Being from all the Nations living on this planet accomplish the task set out on that mountain along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Reread Matthew 28:16-20. What is God saying to us?

In her book **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed Editions Canada, 2013)**, Robin Wall Kimmerer identifies seven eras in time on Turtle Island as known to the Knowledge Keepers of Anishinaabe Peoples. Each period is understood as a particular Fire from the story of the Seven Fires Prophecy.

During the era of the First Fire, Anishinaabe Peoples lived along the eastern seaboard where the sun rose each and every day. Powerful spiritual teachings were provided for the good of the Peoples as well as for the ongoing care of the lands and waters. However, a prophet foretold of changes that would come so the Anishinaabe Peoples needed to move westward to find places “where the food grows on the water”. As a result, Anishinaabe Peoples migrated up what is now known as the St. Lawrence River Valley. Burning coals were carried in **shkitagen**, black knobs of fungal growths found on birch trees. Around the area which is now known as Montreal, their burning coals lit fires in the hearths of the Anishinaabe Peoples.

During the era of the Second Fire, a new Teacher arose among the Anishinaabe Peoples and counselled them to move further westward. Trusting in this vision, once again burning coals were carried in **shkitagen** to lands nestled among what is now known as the Great Lakes. Around the area now known as Detroit, their burning coals carried in **shkitagen** lit fires again in the hearths of Anishinaabe Peoples. However, these Peoples became divided among three groups, the Ojibwe, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi and spread out in different directions in the forests and meadows around the Great Lakes. Generations later some of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi settled on what is now Manitoulin Island to form the Three Fires Confederacy.

During the era of the Third Fire, the Anishinaabe Peoples continued to spread around the Great Lakes, finding places spoken about in the time of the First Fire. Traditional territories were established where Anishinaabe Peoples lived well under the care of Maples, Birch, Tamarack, and White Pines as well as Sturgeon, Salmon, Whitefish, and Pickerel. Other relatives such as Beaver, Otters, Muskrat, Deer, Moose, and Bear as well as Eagle, Geese, Ducks, Passenger Pigeons, Loons, and Wild Turkeys offered nourishment, clothing, and tools for survival.

During the era of the Fourth Fire, two prophets arose among the Anishinaabe Peoples, foretelling the coming of light-skinned peoples in ships from the east. Each prophet spoke about a different vision, making the path ahead unclear. One prophet communicated that the offshore peoples **zaaganaash** came in peace and bring great knowledge. The combination of Anishinaabe knowledge and wisdom plus the knowledge brought by **zaaganaash** would create a great, new nation together. The second prophet proclaimed a warning, pointing out that what appeared to be visage of friendship might actually be the face of death. These new people might share the land and waters or seize the resources of creation with greed for their own benefit. By their actions, the face of **zaaganaash** would become evident to the Anishinaabe Peoples. As history unfolded, the name for the offshore peoples came to be **chimokman**, the long-knife people.

During the era of the Fifth Fire, the prophecies eventually became history on Turtle Island for all Indigenous Peoples. The prophets began to speak about the coming of offshore people coming in black

robes with black books, teaching about joy and salvation which turned Indigenous Peoples against their traditional teachings and wisdom, the use of medicines based on thousands of years of learning from plants, the use of ceremonies and spiritual practices passed down from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and the principles of an honourable harvest. Diseases swept through communities, bringing death to large numbers across Turtle Island. In what is now known as the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, millions of Indigenous Peoples were slaughtered by soldiers, mariners, and settlers. Indigenous Peoples suffered for several generations.

During the era of the Sixth Fire, Indigenous Peoples were separated from their traditional lands and waters as well as each other, forced to live on much smaller reservations. Their children and youth were removed from their homes to learn **zaaganaash** ways. Settler governments passed laws to forbid the use of their ceremonies and spiritual practices as well as the use of their languages. A universe of knowledge and wisdom vanished in over a very short period of time. Family and community members were separated and broken. Parents struggled to connect with their children and care for them. Children turned away from their Elders. People lost their way and their purpose in life. The prophets communicated, “The cup of life would almost become the cup of grief.” In spite of this destruction and oppression, some continued to speak their language, to teach their traditional knowledge and wisdom, to use their medicines, to maintain their ceremonies and spiritual practices, to identify the gifts given to them by Creator and Great Spirit, and to care for the land and waters as their Ancestors had done.

In the era of the Seventh Fire, a new Anishinaabe People will emerge with a sacred purpose. In this era, children and youth will return with a passion to the traditional teachings and wisdom handed down and re-presented by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Through Naming Ceremonies, the People of the Seventh Fire will discover their particular gifts provided by Creator and Great Spirit and grow into the meaning of their names, contributing to the well-being of their respective Anishinaabe People and taking up their responsibilities to protect the lands and waters gifted to them and their descendants. The People of the Seventh Fire are expected to walk backward along the Red Road retracing the steps of their Ancestors and picking up what had been left along the path. There will be a movement to revitalize Indigenous languages and cultural practices. Seeds indigenous to the land and water will be planted. Landscapes and waterways will be restored. The youth will return to the land and waters with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Ceremonies and spiritual practices will be revised, generating creative energy in people of all ages. For the Seventh Fire People, prophets also communicate about the choices along the Red Road to walk the path which is scorched black and hard or the path which is green and soft surrounded by healthy forests, grassy meadows, and clean waterways.

Reread Matthew 28:16-20. What is God calling us to be and do?

Somewhere along the way, those who followed the original eleven sent out to proclaim good news by the Crucified and Risen Jesus lost their way. Seek out those who show gratitude to the Source of All Life and Love who provides day by day all that we need. Celebrate the efforts of others in caring for the most vulnerable. Join with others who protect the land and waters for future generations to be blessed.