

THURSDAY IN THE SEVENTH WEEK OF EASTER May 20, 2021

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Jesus amazed people by his teachings and by his efforts in making the afflicted and destitute whole. In a village in Samaria, Jesus speaks about his upcoming betrayal and sets his face for his final journey to the city of Jerusalem. Jesus sends seventy of his closest followers out into the towns and villages to proclaim good news with the same authority with which he demonstrated to both Hebrew People and foreigners in the land in his words and actions. When the seventy return, Jesus rejoices as he learns about all of the good news stories which brought glory to Creator and great Spirit.

Read Luke 10:25-37. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?

A lawyer seeks Jesus and opens himself to learn, asking a question raised by many in every generation. Jesus answers by posing a question. The lawyer knows the Hebrew Scriptures and responds using a summary of a declaration of faith repeated every day by the faithful in morning and evening prayers as well as at bedtime and significant celebrations during the year. Every Hebrew who could speak learned this affirmation as children, with the males learning to sing this Scripture from the Book of Deuteronomy for worship. At the time of death, these words are expected to be the last words to be uttered. This declaration of faith known as **SHEMA ISRAEL** begins with these words, **"Hear, O Israel! God is our Lord, God is One!"** Being a learned man, the lawyer answers by including a common teaching in the application of the commandments received by the prophet Moses from the Lord God Almighty, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself!"** Luke 10:27. Jesus points out that this lawyer provided the correct answer and then challenges him to be more specific in what he could do to show others about the depth and breadth and height of his gratitude for the mighty love which the Source of All Life and Love has demonstrated to him. As a Teacher, Jesus is acutely aware that there is a profound difference between knowledge and understanding...between knowing the right answer and applying the meaning of any teaching in practical terms.

It is easy to recite from rote memory nuggets of truth which we have been taught in childhood and rest with this knowledge. It is also easy to make these declarations of spiritual wisdom in acts of common worship and go out into the world without applying what we have solemnly stated to the circumstances of others in our communities and in places around the world. Jesus does not let the lawyer off the hook. Jesus tells a parable teaching all with ears to hear and eyes to see that the practice of faith is always both personal and political. The priest crossed the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and walked on the other side as far away as he could get from the injured traveller stripped and severely beaten by thieves. Another man who had been set aside by his parents from the tribe of Levi as a firstborn son and dedicated to serve the Lord God Almighty also walked on the other side of the road without stopping to help this obvious victim of violence receive any form of first aid and any ongoing care needed in recovery. Jesus challenges the lawyer be radically different from the priest and the Levite in the practice of faith, responding to those who suffer injustice with the same generosity as the Source of All Life and Love has shown him.

Reread Luke 10:25-37. What is God saying to us?

In this generation, news travels quickly and comes from places scattered around this planet. Instances of violence and inequities in how different people are mistreated can be overwhelming.

In her book **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed Editions Canada, 2013)**, Robin Wall Kimmerer recounts several stories about the Windigo from her Anishinaabe heritage. Dr. Kimmerer describes Windigo as larger than life giant humanoid with a heart of ice, a foul stench emanating from his mouth, incredible physical strength, and a hunger for human flesh. Windigo are believed to follow Human Beings in driving snowstorms, walking in their steps and waiting until a person is cold, weak, disorientated, and vulnerable before moving close enough to kill and devour the flesh of their victims in a cannibalistic frenzy. In one story, Dr. Kimmerer remembers seeing much larger footprints in her own footprints in the snow during the previous winter when she went for a walk across a field and over a ridge to a forest of healthy maple trees where she gathered her medicines from the plants from among the Maple Nation during the other three warmer seasons. In the following spring, Dr. Kimmerer felt a chill in the air in walking along deep ruts in this field. At the top of the ridge, she discovered that at some time during the winter, the new neighbour hired loggers to cut down all of the maple trees, leaving behind a diseased beech and a few old hemlock trees which were worthless for owner of the sawmill. Dr. Kimmerer looked out over the drifts of white trilliums as well as bloodroot, hepatica, bellwort, trout lily, ginger, and wild leeks smiling up at the late spring sun and realized that these plants would be burnt up by the heat of the summer sun without the protection of the leafy maple canopy overhead. With her knowledge of botany, Dr. Kimmerer also realized that this field would become covered with brambled, growing invasive species like garlic mustard and buckthorn in the footprints of the Windigo. Dr. Kimmerer concluded that a world full of gifts from Creator and Great Spirit cannot compete with a world full of commodities bought and sold through the marketplace.

From the Anishinaabe perspective, Human Beings who demonstrated the presence of Windigo through self-centred and greedy behaviours would face banishment if these behaviours did not change through the healing interventions of Elders and Grandmothers.

At a gathering sponsored by Ryerson University and the David Suzuki Foundation supporting the Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabek (Grassy Narrows First Nation) and Wabaseemoong (One Man Lake, Swan Lake, and White Dog First Nations) Independent Nations in their struggles with the federal and provincial governments, I first heard an Anishinaabe story about Windigo. Chief Stacey LaForme from the Missisaukas of New Credit Between recounted the story and identified Windigo as greed propelling the economic system forward without taking any responsibility for the consequences for the health of the planet and the Human Beings downstream. Between 1970 and 1976, Dryden Chemicals dumped mercury into the English-Wabigoon River system contaminating the watershed downstream. In 1986, a settlement agreement with Grassy Narrows First Nation and White Dog First Nation established a mercury disability fund and a mercury disability board to administer funding to Band Members impacted by mercury poisoning. In 2016, research concluded that 90% of each of these Indigenous communities demonstrate symptoms of mercury poisoning. In 2017, the Ontario

government designated \$85 Million for remediation after former employees from the pulp and paper corporation identified the location of buried barrels of mercury, disintegrating and releasing more mercury into the river system. However, the extraction of layers of mercury contaminated soils in the riverbeds and adjacent lands have not been started and completed as promised. In November 2020, the federal government promised to provide \$200.1 M over five years to build treatment centres in each Indigenous community. An additional \$300 K was promised annually to fund the operation of these treatment centres.

Dr. Kimmerer recounts the story in which Nanabozho fights an epic battle with Windigo. Fierce fighting, many weapons, trickery, and courage along with legions of warriors are required to finally defeat the monster. Unlike other stories of Windigo which take place in winter, this story is set in the heat of the summer when the nose can smell the scents of flowers, soil, and moving waters. Summer known as *nibiin* in Anishinaabemowin is the time of plenty. The medicine which overpowers the monster of overconsumption is an abundance of the gifts of creation which feed and nourish Human Beings. Dr. Kimmerer maintains that since capitalism flourishes upon a framework of scarcity, an alternate economic framework based the principles of abundance needs to be utilized. Such an economic system becomes a challenge for Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous allies to develop so that the basic needs of Human Beings can be met and the planet protected from further unsustainable exploitation and destruction.

Reread Luke 10:25-37. What is God calling us to be and do?

Recount the many ways in which the Source of All Life and Love provides for you at times of significant change as well as on a daily basis. Express gratitude for these many blessings, teaching your children and grandchildren how to do this. Of the many instances of injustices and inequities which other Human Beings experience here and in various parts of the world, be creative and find a way to make a difference in these circumstances according to the gifts that you have been given.

David Franks