

Thursday after Pentecost: May 27, 2021

In the Matthean Gospel after a period of teaching in places of worship and healing those afflicted along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus climbs a mountain as the prophet Moses climbed a mountain some centuries earlier in wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Unlike Moses who sought an encounter with the Source of All Life and Love....the Lord God Almighty...the Creator of the Universe in order to return with the Commandments and prescriptions for living to be given to the Hebrew People, Jesus speaks to those closest to him and the crowds gathered on the mountainside directly as God in Human Form...the Son sent by the Father into the world...the Co-Creator of the Universe in order for the knowledge and wisdom of Human Beings created in the image of the Source of All Life and Love to share with all of the Peoples of this creation. The Beatitudes begin a lengthy section of pithy reflections about the purpose of communities of the faithful, a summary of the Commandments given to the Hebrew People, and spiritual practices giving direction for day-to-day living.

Read Matthew 7:1-12. What catches my attention in this gospel reading?

This chapter in the Matthean gospel begins with a stern admonition, **“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged! Matthew 7:1.** Jesus identifies a negative dynamic in relationships which pushes others away as less than full Human Beings, assigns blame for painful circumstances, denigrates the value of others to the Source of All Life and Love, and justifies the uses of many different forms of violence and hatred to be directed towards these individuals and Peoples.

In personal relationships, a judgmental perspective can cause irreparable damage diminishing the creative energy binding individuals together through blood or by choice. In a matter of moments, words are spoken or actions happen which cause the other person or individuals present intense pain. Harmful reactions and outbursts can be rooted in different emotions. In order to prevent or de-escalate harmful reactions, it is important to identify one's emotions during these interactions so that each participant can provide useful information about ourselves and can call out of our memories the most constructive way to communicate these feelings. It is also useful to be able to make “I statements” in taking responsibility for our own part in the interaction and in allowing the other participants to take responsibility for their part in painful exchanges. There are many reflective tools which help us to understand how different individuals perceive the world, organize their thoughts and feelings, explore the world, and communicate their perspective.

In more complex social, economic, and political relationships, inequalities perpetuate oppressive dynamics which favour the wealthy, the privileged, the creators of public policies, and those with power to fulfil their dreams and obtain outcomes for themselves and their descendants. In order to dismantle these oppressive dynamics, it is good to acknowledge how social, economic, and political structures disempower Human Beings and perpetuate various forms of violence and hatred. A non-judgmental framework helps to identify what needs to be changed and ways to connect with others to make these changes happen. An inclusive approach and humility help rebuild healthier relationships.

It is not surprising that Jesus speaks about living life out of an understanding of generosity and abundance. When we continually acknowledge that the Source of All Life and Love freely gives all that we need to survive and thrive, you and I then gain the capacity to give to others from our own experiences of abundance. When other Human Beings keep our best interests at heart and foremost in their minds, you and I will have received food to eat, appropriate clothing to wear, adequate shelter to protect us from the elements, quality and meaningful education, physical and emotional safety, and wisdom to live constructively with others. Over time, we learn to ask those closest to us and upon whom we depend as well as to search in the public domain how to accomplish our dreams and obtain what we need. You and I also learn how to help others locally and around the planet fulfil their dreams and have their needs met too.

Reread Matthew 7:1-12. What is God saying to us?

An Anishinaabe Grandmother sent me an email this week identifying a statement and a question communicated by a non-Indigenous member of a worshipping community during conversations in a learning event: **“Indians need to forgive and forget for the sake of their children. Why can’t they just forget what has happened, forget and move on? Their children need them to do that!”**

In a respectful relationship between non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples, it is important to listen and understand our common experiences as Human Beings. Both non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples journey from conception to birth and then from birth to death. During pregnancy, expectant mothers need to have all of their needs met so that life within their wombs can grow into the being as fully developed and as healthy as possible. Once born, every child needs a variety of caregivers in the family and community to provide the resources to grow in every aspect of their development. A great deal is required for this growth and development to take place: nutritious food; safe and clean water; available and quality health care; clothing appropriate for each of the four seasons; safe and adequate housing; learning opportunities which nourish the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of our bodies, emotional well-being, minds, and spirits; an understanding about our particular strengths and gifts which we offer others in our families and communities; dreams about our respective paths through life; and a variety of resources to accomplish the short-term and long-term goals which we set for ourselves; and a planet within the universe from which we as Human Beings experience an abundance of earthy gifts to sustain us into the future. During this pandemic, Human Beings also are learning what our Elders need for long term residential care to experience in the closing years of our lives.

Since European explorers, fishing vessels, fur traders, and farmers began to arrive on Turtle Island, relationships between non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples have ranged from being respectful to being exploitative and strenuously racist. Missionaries arrived too bringing a Book, working to convert Indigenous Peoples to Christianity. As a result, Indigenous Peoples from coast to coast were prohibited from speaking their languages as well as from participating in ceremonies and openly implementing their spiritual practices. For over 150 years, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and United Churches operated residential schools funded by federal governments. Since the closing of residential schools in Canada, the United, Anglican, and Presbyterian Churches have made

apologies for the destruction of Indigenous families and communities as well as the spiritual harm caused in efforts to assimilate Indigenous Peoples into the Canadian population. In 2008, the federal government issued an apology for the harm caused by social, economic, and political efforts to claim the lands and waters for private and corporate ownership as well as “to remove the Indian” from people of all ages with Indigenous heritage. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Report identified the policies and practices of the pre-confederation and Canadian governments as examples of cultural genocide. It is important to know our history and understand the ongoing impact of this history in this generation.

It is not easy work for both non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples to turn around the harm which happened and to move forward into a new future. Forgiveness is about making changes in our minds and hearts as well as in our more complex social, economic, and political relationships. Forgetting what happened and how the policies and practices of cultural genocide continue today is not a strategy that works in any way. Human Beings repent by remembering the harm which we have caused and continue to perpetuate. It is important to seek out Indigenous People and listen to their stories about what happened to their Ancestors and themselves. Learning what happened is necessary in order to change our convictions and hurtful attitudes. Forgetting our common history only keeps racism in place.

Both non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples have responsibilities to raise the next generations of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren to live in this world together and to shape the future for their descendants. Repentance and forgiveness build relationships. Healing happens when Human Beings remember what happened, listen to each other, and provide mutual aid to the most vulnerable. Much work still needs to be done in order for healing to happen for all of us.

Reread Matthew 7:1-12. What is God calling us to be and do?

Be open to learning the truth about what happened in the past in the relationships between non-Indigenous Settlers and Indigenous Peoples. A great deal more information is available now than ever before in our past. Ask questions and seek answers from as many different sources as possible not only about what happened in the past but also what dreams people hold for the future. Celebrate with others who demonstrate resilience and are working to make a difference for those who are not yet born.

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