



THE REPUDIATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

A Biblical Reflection

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PREFACE

AN INVITATION TO STUDY

This biblical reflection is being launched as an educational resource for United Church of Christ congregations and affiliated organizations to engage in faith formation and justice advocacy during General Synod 30 (2015), a national biennial meeting, in Cleveland, Ohio - a city in which the professional baseball franchise adopted the name "Indians" a hundred years ago.

The General Synod 29 (2013) of the United Church of Christ passed the resolution to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery which authorized the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the theft of their lands. This doctrine is still operative today in U.S. law and in international law, and continues to have serious impact on the ordinary daily lives of contemporary Native American communities.

As part of the implementation of the resolution, the joint working group of Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM) and Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) offer this resource for our churches to take up with prayer. It is also offered as a prayer to God, by whose grace and power our hearts are transformed, our minds' eye are opened, and our lives and communities are changed.

Originally, most of the core reflections in this study were written as meditations on the 2014 Lenten Sunday lectionary passages by Norm "Jack" Jackson, and specifically through the lens of Doctrine of

Discovery. Because of the favorable response to these meditations, the joint working group converts them into five sessions of study that can be used any time in the year. These biblical reflections are truly examples of spiritual engagement with a Still-Speaking God.

This study consists of five sessions, which order has been arranged by Rosemary McCombs Maxey for an overall theological structure and flow. She also wrote additional questions-to-ponder. Roxanne Gould wrote additional reflections on Mother Earth and for youth, the latter of which are also relevant for any adult to unearth early messages they received as a child or teenager. The next edition of this study will include perspectives from diverse Native Hawaiians. It will be launched by General Synod 31.

For multi-media materials that introduce this study, Toni Buffalo assisted in the production of the "Discovered, or Stolen?" video clip. Marlene Helgemo led the efforts to produce two video clips on a history of the Doctrine of Discovery and a meditation on what it means to be a "pilgrim" today. For links, see http://www.ucc.org/justice_racism_doctrine-of-discovery_index

"It is the responsibility of the people that have settled here to know and meet and come to an understanding of who we are as indigenous people ... [w]e might have something to add to your walk of life. We might have

something to bring to the Church. We might have something that maybe we can share together," noted Toni Buffalo from the Dakota Association and member of the Council on American Indian Ministries.

We would like to invite adult forums, intergenerational faith leaders and faith translators who are open to challenges to traditional theological understanding, and Indigenous people who are examining internalized racism and colonialism from within the Church, to take up this study with prayer and to:

- Explore and engage what it means for the UCC to "repudiate" the Doctrine of Discovery.
- Rethink theology, bible study and faith symbols without colonial tones and with extravagance!
- Rethink our relationships with each other where we live as well as globally.
- Rethink how we can be Church together – healing and reconciling.

Let us join in this study with hope, strength, and solidarity. And may the Spirit of God dwell among us as we journey into brave spaces of learning, respectful spaces of listening, and transformative ways of being and action. Amen.

The Joint CAIM-JWM Working Group
Summer, 2015.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY?

The discovery concept has basically has two separate references. Theologically, it provided the spiritual rationale for Europeans since the times of the Crusades to conquer and confiscate other lands, including what is now the United States. There were papal documents which laid the groundwork that, later, Protestants adopted. It treated the indigenous peoples as if they were animals; they had no (European) title to the land on which they lived. Thus, the Church justified removing and killing them.

Legally, the discovery principle was written into United States law as a doctrine to deny land rights to American Indians, through the Supreme Court case *Johnson v. McIntosh* in 1823. The decision stripped American Indians of their right to their own independence, providing a rationale for taking land away from the indigenous peoples, with the support of federal law. As a concept of international law, it continues to be cited in the 21st century. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues noted that the Doctrine of Discovery “was the foundation of the violation of their [Indigenous peoples] human rights.”

The historical consequences of the Doctrine of Discovery and the trauma resulted from the loss of homeland, genocide, forced removal, language repression etc. continues to impact subsequent generations. The contemporary impact of the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery experienced by indigenous peoples in the U.S. includes: excessive poverty, teenage suicides that outpaced all other ethnicities, extreme incidences of Type II diabetes, unemployment rates that rank among the highest – these are but a few of the cultural, communal, individual injuries across generations.

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to the joint CAIM-JWM working group:

Marlene Helgemo, CAIM director, pastor of All Nations Church, Minneapolis; Kevin Finley, Chair of CAIM, and member of New Town UCC, North Dakota; Rosemary McCombs Maxey from Muskogee Nation, advocate for Dakota Association UCC; Winifred Boub and Toni Buffalo, Dakota Association UCC; Larry Littlegeorge from Ho-Cak Nation and UCC church at Indian Mission, Wisconsin; Roxanne Gould, educator from Objiwe Nation and member of All Nations UCC, Minneapolis; Michael Maluhia Warren, lay leader, Hawaiian Association of Evangelical Churches; Toni Bissen, executive director, Pu’a Foundation, Hawai’i; Charles McCollough, retired UCC clergy who drafted the apology regarding Hawaiian sovereignty; Linda Jaramillo, Executive Minister, JWM; Bentley deBardelaben, Minister for Administration and Communications, JWM; Elizabeth Leung, convener of the group, Minister for Racial Justice, JWM.

INTRODUCTION

CALLING FOR THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO REPUDIATE THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY WHICH AUTHORIZED THE GENOCIDE OF NATIVE PEOPLES AND THE THEFT OF NATIVE LANDS

APPROVED AS AMENDED | A RESOLUTION OF WITNESS

THE TEXT OF THE MOTION

Whereas from the Crusades through the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church promulgated several Papal Bulls which authorized and justified the destruction, killing and appropriating lands of indigenous peoples. These Papal Bulls formulated the theological base for what became the tragic genocide of American Indians; and

Whereas Protestant churches beginning as early as 1609 when English clergy in Jamestown developed a coherent narrative that brought together a legal rationalization for invading America, debasing American Indians and made a Christian commitment to convert Indians – a commitment which they never delivered; and

Whereas the Supreme Court in 1823 in *Johnson v. McIntosh* incorporated into American law the Doctrine by claiming the United States inherited the American conquest from the English; and

Whereas 1845 was the first time the phrase Manifest Destiny was used to affirm the USA was called by Providence to dominate the continent for the free development of America's inevitable growth. Manifest Destiny grew out of, and was based on, the Doctrine of Discovery; and

Whereas the United Nations adopted a resolution entitled United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 requesting nations to affirm, it took the United States four years before it signed it; and

Whereas the World Council of Churches called upon its member churches to adopt its Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery Impact on Indigenous Peoples, the UCC has not. The Episcopal Church and the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church have done so.

Whereas there is a growing awareness and concern in the United States about the Doctrine, the United Church of Christ, given its commitment to justice, has not yet participated in a formal manner; and

Whereas not only has the Doctrine never been repudiated, court decisions against Indians have been made within the past several decades based on the Doctrine.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ repudiates the Doctrine of Discovery.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ declares and confesses that the doctrine has been and continues to be a shameful part of United States and our Church's history.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ joins with its ecumenical partners to explore ways to compensate American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians for lands and resources that were stolen and are still being stolen and which are now the United States of America.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ requests that Justice and Witness Ministries join with the Council for American Indian Ministry and others to prepare educational materials for the churches.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ requests that the substantive study materials developed by JWM and CAIM be presented to the Thirtieth General Synod with suggestions for how the UCC might undertake various forms of action. The Episcopal Church provides a model for such follow through.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the United States government to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery.

FUNDING

The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Collegium of officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities of the United Church of Christ will determine the implementing body.

INTRODUCTION

A TESTIMONY

TONI BUFFALO

"I'm from the Cheyenne River Lakota reservation in South Dakota and early on in my life...I started to learn about our old ways of prayer through our sacred sweat lodge and different ceremonies that I, I participated in ...

"I experienced abuses ... Our elders said they gave us this bible and they took our land... Reservations were created; we were put on the land that nobody wanted.

"When this person called Columbus came, planted his flag and discovered North America he did it on the basis of that edict [Doctrine of Discovery],

"My husband who is 56 years old, is the last generation that speaks our Lakota language fluently, 56, I mean that's gone... It wasn't just the language, our spirituality was attacked, our way of life, our medicines were attacked, all coming from this Doctrine of Discovery.

"It is the responsibility of the people that have settled here to know and meet and come to an understanding of who we are as indigenous people... We might have something to add to your walk of life. We might have something to bring to that church. We might have something that maybe we can share together."

Excerpted from "Discovered? Or Stolen!"
<http://tinyurl.com/padx4o2>

INTRODUCTION

“THE WASHINGTON REDSKINS AND OTHER ATROCITIES”¹

JACK JACKSON

Foreword

One noon I was having lunch with Yvonne Delk (African-American) and Linda Jaramillo (Latina) during which we were discussing the different ways groups of people of color have been damaged by racism and oppression. Also, we briefly noted how people of color have been misrepresented by the dominant Euro cultures through the centuries. After a few moments I suggested that I did not want to engage in a pissing contest. That meant that people of color should never engage in contests about who has it the worst. Each experiences life in the United States differently and has had incredibly different forms of struggles for justice. We all agreed that those struggles are far from over. Opponents of racial justice and equality love to have people of color dissipate their energy by arguing with each other.

Introduction

Initially, I planned to title this paper “The Washington Redskins or The Washington Rednecks?” Then I reached into my memory bank and recalled “Redneck” emerged from a positive history. Consider these three sources of “redneck” affirmation.

Redneck first appeared in the 17th century as Scottish Covenanters, or supporters of the No Covenant, signed a document stating Scotland preferred the Presbyterian form of government. It would not accept the Church of England as its established church. People signed the document in their own blood, and wore red pieces of cloth around their necks as a distinctive insignia, hence the term redneck. The term became slang for a Scottish dissenter many of these people fled to Ulster (Northern Ireland).

In United States the word was used in West Virginia by coal miners. There a large group of unionized miners demanded that non-union miners elsewhere be permitted to organize. They wore red bandanas to identify themselves. That is how they became “rednecks.” The other origin emerged in the south. Hard-working men spent hours daily out in the fields. It was honorable work. So much time in the sun reddened their necks – this origin for the word referred to hard-working men turning dark red from constant exposure to the sun.

Later the word took on negative meanings, meanings which have entered our every-day speech to refer to biased, bigoted and narrow-minded people. The Encarta dictionary (Windows 7) calls redneck an offensive term for an uneducated and prejudiced person – living in the southern United States. I found the latter phrase to be very interesting.

So, I tossed out the “Redneck” term as derisive because I did not want to be vulnerable to the argument “‘Redskins’ honors Indians.” If redneck had an honorable origin, why not consider redskins as a name honoring American Indians? There are enough powerful people ignorant of the “R” word’s origin (I’ll talk about that later) so they can carry on with self-interested ignorance.

¹ A presentation at Doing Theology, Pilgrim Place, Claremont CA, February 19, 2014.

It boggles my mind that people cannot grasp that Indian mascots, in general, are offensive. Is it ignorance? Is it racism? Is it insensitivity? Is it because they know they can get by with it? I have come to believe it's all of the above. And, Redskins is the worst form of insult in current usage.

Some people ask, "Aren't there more important battles for [American] Indians to fight now?" Well, yes. In the divine economy of imperialism, genocide, racism, poverty, broken treaties, alcoholism, drug addiction and overwhelming health crises due to the incompetence, underfunding and low priority of the government run Indian Health Service Indian mascots may not seem all that important.

But, it is symbolic. I am using "symbol" here in the way I learned from [theologian] Tillich. He had an interesting way of describing symbols, which I have found evocative, and seems useful here. A symbol "participates in that to which it points: the flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands. Therefore, it cannot be replaced except after historic catastrophe that changes the reality of the nation which symbolizes. An attack on the flag is felt as an attack on the majesty of the group in which it is acknowledged. Such an attack is considered blasphemy area."

"Redskins" becomes a symbol imposed upon American Indian people. To misquote Tillich, "Redskins" participates in the diminution of Indian people into being both less than human and savages. This, among other things, makes the symbol of Redskins undeniably important.

But there is more. It has been a time-honored American tradition that groups, ethnic, racial, or whatever, have the privilege of deciding what is offensive and what is complementary. In this case the president of the Washington football team claimed the privilege of determining what is offensive to Native Americans. In exploring this issue on the Internet it does not take long to see how many white people believe objection to the term "Redskins" is being politically correct.

My other concern relates to the question, "What makes it so difficult to see the term "Redskins" and the use of other [American] Indian figures as mascots is offensive?" The general public has no difficulty in understanding what is anti-Black, Latino/a or Asian. I have come to believe there is something deep in the American psyche which represses the reality this nation was built on the genocide of the Indigenous peoples. Using Indians as mascots is simply one symptom of that disease.

Mascot names can only emerge because in the early centuries of the European invasion Indians were seen as less than human. Additionally there is a doctrine which proclaimed Indians did not exist. Terra nullius meant the land was vacant regardless of how many [indigenous people] were there. Even Reinhold Niebuhr believed that. "He claimed that North America was a "virgin continent when the Anglo-Saxons came, with a few [American] Indians in a primitive state of culture." What can we do when one of America's most distinguished theologians bears a lie like this? This was the self-serving belief the continent was vacant land going to waste without what became the environmentally destructive farming and climate changing urban development.

The significance of the symbolic nature of mascots resides in the question, "Just who do they think [American] Indians are?" They demean Indian cultural images, actions and

history. The only word for the defenders of Indian mascots, for me, is racism, in its technical meaning; prejudice with the power to implement that prejudice. They just do not seem to get it. To say they use Indian mascots to honor Indians simply exacerbates their racism.

Professional Teams

There are varieties of reasons people use to defend Indian mascots for professional teams. Consider the following: Roger “Goodell (head of the NFL) was asked by USA TODAY Sports about how the controversy over the Washington Redskins name has ramped up this past year. His stance and the team’s stance are known. What is not known, however, is whether Goodell would feel comfortable addressing an American Indian “Redskin” to his or her face?”

He goes on to say “But let me remind you: This is the name of a football team, a football team that has had that name for 80 years. That has presented the name in a way that is honorable to Native Americans. We recognize that many don’t agree with the name. And we respect that.” Does he really believe 80 years of degradation justifies its continuance?

“I spent the last year talking to many of the leaders of the Native American community,” Goodell said. “We are listening and we are trying to make sure we understand the issues. I am interested in who he is talking to. What is so complex about using a denigrating name that he must take time to “study” to understand the issue? After 522 years one would think that those who espouse American ideals would begin to wrestle with the continuance of [indigenous peoples’] destruction.

I find it difficult to understand what prevents Goodell from understanding how offensive Redskins is to [American] Indians. I have many responses to him which may not pass muster. However, there are those who have suggested he rename the team the Washington Whites, since the power structure behind the football team is white. Or maybe we should suggest the Washington Blacks, or Africans, or better yet the Washington Slaves. And there have been several useful suggestions.

Of course another option is present. Since most of his players are of African descent one might call them the Washington “N” – that forbidden word which is equivalently destructive as Redskins is to Indians. Too few people understand that. How can Redskins be honorable? We all know the “N” was never honorable. It was used because Africans were judged to be less than human and fit for slavery. Even blatant racists will refrain from using the “N” word now because they know they will receive serious blowback landing them in PR trouble. Blowback is more serious to them than their offensiveness. This is demonstrated in the book *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* by Ian Haney Lopez (Oxford University Press, 2014.)

Who defines what is offensive to [American] Indian people: rich white men in wealthy corporations or Indian people and their official organizations? The Oneida nation has brought suit against the use of the word. Does that indicate they feel honored? The National Congress of American Indians and has made it wonderfully clear how offensive “Redskins” is. The NCAI produced a marvelous piece for YouTube which some of you have seen. The NCAI is the most all-inclusive and representative organization in Indian country.

The use of Redskins should get this football team into terrible trouble. Here are some

reasons why it does not (though there are some hopeful signs emerging).

1. Money: what would it cost to recall the paraphernalia the Washington team has out there for sale? How much would it cost to design and sell new items representing the Washington mascot? Money, by which American culture seems to measure the value of everything, strengthens the commitment to “Redskins.” A divergent perspective, one I hope could happen, is that it could be financially profitable because the team could sell the old stuff as collector’s items so the cost of changing paraphernalia could be profitable. I really don’t know which is more likely to happen. Snyder may not care. He has vowed NEVER to change the name.

2. The [American] Indian population is much too small to be a political force. I know of only one time when the Indian population of South Dakota provided a slim margin of victory in a senatorial race.

3. [American] Indians lack money to buy Congress in order to outlaw [the] mascots, or to produce media which could the correct misleading images they have produced for many, many decades. More often than not media intently identifies whatever’s been some racial slur which leads a celebrity to go through the ritual of apology. “Redskins” is obviously not in that category.

4. As I mentioned before, I believe the United States keeps the genocide of [American] Indians safely beneath its memory and conscience.

During World War II cartoonists drew caricatures of Japanese military men. Chief Wahoo [of Cleveland professional baseball franchise] reminds me of some of those despicable caricatures.

College Atrocities

I have long thought it ironic, as well as astonishingly revealing, that schools and colleges have used [American] Indians as mascots for years. Their use demonstrates that educational institutions are not always a source of enlightenment. Several colleges, as soon as it became clear to them Indians are not mascots, graciously dropped their use. Stanford and Dartmouth come to mind right immediately. South Dakota’s legislature declared it illegal for schools in the state (both public schools as well as higher education) to use Indian mascot names. This was particularly gratifying since South Dakota has sometimes been labeled the “Mississippi of Indian Country.” The University of South Dakota’s athletic teams were known as the “Fighting Sioux.” Indian intramural teams responded by calling themselves the “Fighting Norwegians.”

The University of Illinois had Chief Illiniwek as an embodied mascot. Before football games he would ride a horse out to the center of the field wearing a full feather headdress. It is not known to many that to wear a full headdress is an honor that does not fall on every [American] Indian. And, of course, not all tribes wear feather headdresses. When Illiniwek reached the 50 yard line he would jump to the ground and go through all kinds of crazy gyrations as if he were suffering from a psychotic convulsive condition. Someone should have given him a sedative and sent him to a mental hospital. The chief also participated on the basketball court and other places where the University thought it might enhance their athletic image.

It has been reported, and I acknowledge I do not know the exact source, that a young [American] Indian girl saw him on television or in some other way, and began crying. She asked her mother, “Why are they making fun of our sacred dance?” Indeed, why are they? What led a white college boy to do this? Glenn and Joyce Trost (he pastored a church in Champaign-Urbana just prior to coming to Pilgrim Place) told me of a Methodist minister who at age 63 had to retire early because of the death threats and hate messages sent to him after he criticized the chief.

Florida State University chose “Seminoles” to demonstrate their ferocity. During a game the fans will engage in what they call the tomahawk chop, miming the use of a tomahawk to chop into something -- most likely their human opponents. They tell the world the Seminole tribe in Florida approves. Perhaps they do give them their blessing. Indian country is aware there are uncle Tomahawks who will play the game from time to time

There are people who actually believe mascots honor [American] Indian people. Sometimes I feel as if these folk are the offspring of the people who opposed desegregation and suggested that the African-American family was stronger during slavery than it is in the black ghettos today. These are the people who believed what they learned from American history in high school – that Manifest Destiny provided the rationale that genocide was essential to build a new nation of freedom and opportunity. I often hear something like this: “It was awful what was done to Indians.” I’ve learned through experience it is better not to respond to that comment. Of course, I should remind them they seem to live conscience-free on the land their ancestors stole.

And then, there are people who are not perceptive enough to realize “Redskins” is a potent metonym for contempt, prejudice and a willingness to insult – and not a willingness to explore the issue.

The Phips Proclamation

I want to get to what I believe to be the origin of the use of the word “Redskins.” The historical context for the name “Redskins” is the Phips Proclamation. It is an 18th-century racist and genocidal policy put into place by the Massachusetts colonial government (Maine was still part of Massachusetts colony at that time, with lots of Congregationalists). In 1755, Spencer Phips, the Lieut. Governor of the Province of Massachusetts issued a call for the genocide of the Penobscot nation whose people had resisted the colonization of their ancestral lands. The proclamation named the Penobscots “to be Enemies, Rebels, and Traitors to his Majesty King George II,” and required Massachusetts residents to “Embrace all opportunities of pursuing, captivating, killing and destroying all and every one of the aforesaid Indians.” It set out a schedule of payments “for every Indian Enemy that they shall kill and produce the Scalp.” Scalps of male Penobscots above the age of 12 years received 50 pounds; female brought in 25 pounds; and children under 12 brought in 20 pounds.” The bloody scalps I have read were called “Redskins.”

Opposition

When Daniel Snyder, owner of the Washington Football Team was asked if he would ever change the mascot his response was unequivocal: never! And he instructed the journalists present when they write the word “never” to put it in caps, NEVER!

While cruising the Internet for resources I discovered changethemascot.org . This website is a primary resource for those who realize that Redskins is not only a slur, but emerges from downright ignorance exacerbated by willful racism. The website makes it very clear [American] Indian organizations and various nations find it offensive. One part of the page presents a panel composed of professional, mostly white men who argue Redskins must go. A psychologist describes Snyder's NEVER as bullying and harassment. He uses a variety of illustrations, including a grade school playground. If something analogous happened at school the principal would identify it immediately as bullying and harassment, bullying in the presence of resistance. I tend to agree.

Now, I will try to move to theology. I promise nothing.

Doing Theology

First, it is clear that there will be little leadership from the churches in this struggle for [American] Indians to claim humanity. Not only have they been blind to their participation in the physical and cultural genocide, they also celebrated the Americanization of Indians as evidence they were becoming Christians. I have written about this elsewhere. This is not like other civil rights struggles which came at a more propitious time in history.

I believe this is a justice issue. I don't know of any church that sees [American] Indian justice as a priority. Several denominations, Episcopalians, UCC and Unitarian Universalists, have voted to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. The United Methodist Bishops offered an inoffensive statement. The Episcopalians are providing remarkable resources on the denominational webpage. The UCC is just getting started. And I am not sure where the Unitarian Universalists are with follow-through from their votes. If mission with Indians in the churches these denominations founded in the 19th century is your concern you will see that they are allowing the congregations on reservations to go the way of attrition – partly because of a lack of a convincing postcolonial message.

Again, I raise the question, how high a priority should the “Redskins” issue be for [American] Indian people? I believe there are two reasons it is important. The first is basic: are Indians human, and do [they] deserve the same recognition as all other peoples on this earth? That is a theological question. Of course, nobody's going to deny that Indians are human these days. It's just that sometimes it's inconvenient to raise justice issues.

Second, it is symptomatic that this issue captures sports media attention, with occasional references in general news, while the most basic justice issues go ignored. I have learned it is a waste of time to talk about broken treaties. If the U.S. government observe at least half of the treaties made with Indian nations the quality of [American] Indian life would improve dramatically. Of course, it is likely that the U.S. will NEVER observe those sacred treaties – sacred, apparently, only in Indian eyes.

So, I'll take one issue: the War against Women. One in every three [American] Indian women will be assaulted, raped or abused. 70 to 80% of these attacks are made by non-Indians. It has been problematical when the abuse takes place on reservations, where most of them do occur. Indians cannot prosecute a white man on an Indian reservation. The WAVA act was supposed to take care of this. Here are quotes from the Washington Post.

For decades, when a Native American woman has been assaulted or raped by a man who is

non-Indian, she has had little or no recourse. [American] Indian police have lacked the legal authority to arrest non-Indian men who commit acts of domestic violence against native women on reservations, and tribal courts have lacked the authority to prosecute the men.

Last year [2013], Congress approved a law — promoted by the Obama administration — that for the first time will allow [American] Indian tribes to prosecute certain crimes of domestic violence committed by non-Indians in Indian country. The Justice Department on Thursday announced it had chosen three tribes for a pilot project to assert the new authority.

The new authority, which will not go into effect for most of the country's 566 federally recognized [American] Indian tribes until March 2015, covers domestic violence committed by non-Indian husbands and boyfriends, but it does not cover sexual assault or rape committed by non-Indians who are "strangers" to their victims. It also does not extend to native women in Alaska.

While this provides hope [American] Indians will wait until March, 2015 for it to become effective. It is worth noting several Republican senators have opposed the procedures of this bill. The reason: white men could not get a fair trial in Indian country. It doesn't seem to trouble them that Indians cannot get a fair trial in white country.

Do I go to the Bible for resource? First, I run into the Conquest which became the model for Manifest Destiny. There are several prophetic statements that make sense in this situation. Perhaps we could consider the Jubilee. This is where they sort out what belongs to whom and return it to their rightful owner. That is out of the question and receives no support even from fundamentalists.

No, I think the nation and the larger world is in such a state of crises that there is little energy for many "small" justice battles. It's too bad the western world waited until now to recognize indigenous wisdom regarding ecology. This is an area where [American] Indian people could make significant contributions.

How does theology deal with support for people who suffered genocide? It is my contention the Christian faith has little to offer — the deep wisdom of [American] Indian cultures is more likely to be a guide for the future.

SESSION ONE

“IS THE LORD AMONG US ?”

EXODUS 17, JOHN 4:10

Prayer ²

God, let honesty always accompany our homage. Amen.

Reflection

In Exodus 17:1-7, Moses led the people out of the wilderness of Sinai. When they found that there was no water at Rephidim, the people quarreled with Moses. Their struggle for physical survival became a struggle for spiritual survival, prompting the people to ask, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Questioning and arguing with God is nothing out of the ordinary in the Bible. We see that God responds to the ungrateful and those who repeatedly test God (Exodus 17:5-7). Could this be a metaphor for us in several ways?

It seems our nation is filled with thirsty spiritual nomads searching for a meaningful oasis but wherever they go they are disappointed. Where will they find water that will save them?

In looking at the brokenness brought about by the Doctrine of Discovery and the devastation it rendered across generations, American Indians and Indigenous peoples rightly ask, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

There is no easy answer for American Indians who find that they are called to faith by a Church that historically justified their demise, which partnered with early settlers to destroy their language and culture, and placed the survivors of this effort on reservations.

In John 4:10, Jesus promised “living water” to quench the thirst of humanity. But the Doctrine of Discovery has left many American Indians to ponder: was the gospel “water” brought by missionaries more satisfying than the “water” embodied in their traditions?

Such is the difficult quest faced by many American Indians who are Christian and have internalized the terrible injustice of cultural racism imposed on them and their ancestors through the Doctrine.

Among the American settlers, a few tried to witness to their Christian faith, to make peace and offer the American Indians a decent place where they could live and be safe as relatives. Such responses were rare however, in part because the many settlers aligned their faith with their individualized Euro-American culture which, in its theological machinations, justified the killing of “savages” and “pagans.”

How did it happen that the churches joined in the decimation of American Indians? There may be several explanations for Christians’ justification of the genocide. They had no question that they had the one true faith, the superior faith, supported by their powerful and superior means of war, led to several centuries in which Europeans exploded over the world through conquest. Their superior weapon systems confirmed their belief in their superiority.

² Kenneth Samuel, *Stillspeaking Daily Devotional*, August 18, 2014. See *Resources*.

“With God on our side...might makes right...”

Such Euro-American faith tended to slip into belief systems, where the tendency is to put a wall around their beliefs, and the wall becomes a fort of protection from intruders, and from which they can attack others. Their belief system allowed, even encouraged, them to decimate the First Nations population as an act of faith.

But, some belief systems, rather than being a fort, are the base from which one’s faith can reach out, be nurtured and grow. Hopefully, a Christian belief system will lead to a nurturing relationship with God that builds bridges not walls, and that means a just relationship with fellow humanity.

Therefore, in the face of the devastating legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, our spiritual practice of repudiation is to cultivate a habit of repenting from indifference toward historical wrongs against American Indians because “we were not there.”

A majority of us live comfortably from the privileged benefits of our settler ancestor’s perfidy. Many of us have immigrant ancestors. Whether their arrival in the U.S. was forced or voluntary, our genealogy is one of both resistance to and collusion with American settler institutions that dispossess American Indians.

A nurturing relationship with God is also a practice of constant turning toward God’s resurrection hope and transforming justice for all of humanity and creation.

Through the Doctrine of Discovery, we acknowledge the sin of “what we did to the American Indians.” Seeking to repudiate it, we renew our mission to repair some of the wrongs of history.

Excessive poverty, teenage suicides that outpaced all other ethnicities, extreme incidences of Type II diabetes, unemployment rates that rank among the highest in our nation – these deadly realities of American Indian life demands our missional understanding through the lens of the Doctrine of Discovery, and our reckoning with the Church’s legacy in its midst.

Questions to Ponder

- In how many ways are Colonizer Christians the victors over human history?
- How many different ways can Christians honor indigenous people in their lands and the lands to which they have been relocated?

Additional Reflection for Youth

The word “nomadic” has often been used to describe American Indians. This word was used to justify the taking of land that was in fact the occupied homeland of Indigenous peoples in U.S., whether or not they had physical structures or homes on that land. Each First Nation had large territories in which they moved about, depending on seasons and food availability. Some parts of the land may be used for gardening and yet others for hunting and gathering. All of their homelands were cultivated, managed and necessary to survival. It was not wild or wilderness in the sense usually implied by settler writers. For American

Indians, the wilderness was and is not wild. It is not evil and does not need to be changed or tamed.

We all need natural places to exist or the things we need as humans will not be there for us either, such as water, wetlands, forests, oceans, jungles, ice, clean air, animals and plants for food and medicine. In respecting and restoring these natural places, one respects First Nations peoples as well. Everywhere we live, work, worship, shop and recreate in the “United States” is a traditional homeland of American Indians. So let us pray in thanksgiving while doing these activities and more...especially regarding our relationship to water which is the lifeblood of this planet.

Feel the land and God’s presence in it...free of human made chemicals. Be “bee, bug and butterfly friendly” without pesticides that enter the water. Use rain barrels and plant a garden with non-GMO indigenous foods and a buffering rain garden to retain and filter runoff water before it enters wetlands and streams. Change church parking lots to water permeable surfaces.

SESSION TWO

SATAN TEMPTS JESUS

MATTHEW 4:8-9

Prayer³

Stillspeaking God, whom we see in all of creation and in all people, show your love for us. Strengthen us day and night to share our very best with our brothers and sisters. Help us walk in the path of understanding and peace.

Reflection

In Matthew 4:8–9, the gospel reads, “[A]gain, the devil took [Jesus] to a very high mountain and showed him all of the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’.”

Satan tempted Jesus to rule over all the kingdoms of the world, and Jesus rebuked him in no uncertain terms. Could Jesus have given a better understanding of imperialism and colonialism?

In contrast to Jesus, the Europeans since the times of the Crusades had justified their conquest of other lands with the Doctrine of Discovery, and their domination of other peoples in the name of the Christian God.

The displacement and genocide of the indigenous peoples in what became the United States is a textbook case of both such conquest and domination. Jesus’ refusal to rule over the kingdoms of the world and their splendor directly confronts the doctrine.

In the 21st century United States, the temptation by Satan in the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery is manifested in the undermined sovereignty of our Indigenous communities and through Congressional and Federal assertions of power over the First Nations. We see this lived out through injustices in water rights, oil and mineral extraction on native lands, border and immigration policies which negatively affect tribal communities, to name a few.

To be a follower of the risen Jesus today is more than cultivating a personal relationship with God through pious prayers which focus on individual needs. Reading the gospel through the lens of the Doctrine of Discovery provides us with a valuable opportunity to move from solely self-examination to being a good relative in the world that God cares for.

Jesus’ response taught us to directly confront the theological and legal rationale for the Doctrine of Discovery. As a nation, will the United States ever repent from the sins of genocide and dispossession it committed justified by the doctrine? How have we taken up the responsibility to address the plight of American Indian communities?

³ Adapted from “Lakota Prayer,” *New Century Hymnal* #851.

Questions to Ponder

Using the story of Jesus' temptations from the devil ...

- How does the Doctrine of Discovery comfort or challenge us in facing our temptations of imperialism and colonialism?
- How are the notions of repudiation and repentance linked?
- What would “do justice, walk humbly with God” in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus look like for us, in repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery?

Additional Reflection for Youth

Often times in our spiritual practices, e.g. during Lent, we give up something like chocolate. Why do we do that? Because we are preparing ourselves before God to say “You gave your Son so I am giving up something to remember this.”

Following this act of giving up, how about giving some of your time, talent or treasure to right a wrong or become part of a positive change? For example; cleaning up a natural area, planting trees, learning about GMO and processed foods, writing your representatives about better labeling and better access to healthy foods for us.

American Indians today suffer from the highest rates of diabetes and other diseases because our land and natural ways of living have been removed. Indigenous people were not even asked to “give up their land” to be a good relative. In fact, after their extreme generosity and hospitality, they were forcibly removed from their ancestral relationships with Earth Mother and all she gave them.

So taking care of Mother Earth and insuring all people have access to healthy food and places to live, will help others and the First Nations communities during any special seasons and all year long.

SESSION THREE

DARKNESS EXPOSED

JOHN 9:1-41, EPHESIANS 5:8-9

Reading

“Religion of the White Man and the Red,” by Chief Red Jacket. ⁴

Reflection

In John 9:1-41, Jesus gave sight to a man born blind – a miracle performed despite the disciples’ difficulty in understanding Jesus’s concern for the blind man. Through this healing, Jesus repudiated the old theology that said that tragedy is the consequence of sin. While we know sinful behavior can lead to tragedy, Jesus goes elsewhere. Instead, he revealed that the man was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him.

The Pharisees in this story had a hard time seeing God’s revelation in Jesus’ healing: that he came to liberate those they deemed sinful. Instead of rejoicing with the man who received sight, and giving glory to God for this liberation, they argued whether Jesus, who broke the Sabbath, could really be showing God’s powers! Where is the real blindness here?

As children of God called to live in the light of Christ (Ephesians 5:8-9), we are called to take responsibility of a dark chapter in our own history: of invaders proclaiming and killing American Indians under the guise of the Doctrine of Discovery and with the blessing of the Church. Do we still hold onto the pharisaical religion that American Indians must have been pagan, evil and/or in the darkness to experience such devastation?

It is not that American Indians failed to challenge Christians. In 1805, when New England missionaries asked permission to preach to the Senecas, Chief Red Jacket responded with his famous speech “Religion for the White Man and the Red.” He noted that the missionaries had been preaching to the white people in the area. He knew them, for they were his neighbors. He concluded his lengthy response with the following:

“We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon [the settlers]. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.” He then closed his speech offering them a blessing on their way back to Boston. He moved to shake hands with the missionaries who turned their back to him and left.

It is often the churches and their history with American Indians who were blind and living in “darkness.” There is much for the Church to repent and expose the darkness of a racist theology that denied God’s image in American Indians by treating them as “pagan,” “evil,” “savage,” and their existence as sinful. A gift to the church from this healing story is an opportunity to shine light into this dark chapter of our history.

The Church must learn to claim its contributions that devastated the First Nations in this country. Today, as the Church makes statements and passes resolutions to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, the challenge of Chief Red Jacket to our missionary ancestors is

⁴ See *Resources*.

again offered to us as a blessing. Our faith calls for a drastic change of behavior of the Church – of how it views the contemporary situation of American Indians.

What would be the fruits of our repentance? How can we truly atone, realizing that repentance without reconciliation and reparations is “cheap grace”? Faith calls for justice as one form of God’s healing power. What is justice but love made visible? “Seeing” is a gift given to us by the Spirit. We have much to “see” in history and in the present.

As American Indian communities facing extreme poverty and high teenage suicide rates, how could we as neighbors make God’s love visible and God’s justice real, on this road to full reconciliation? What reparation would be befitting of the enormity and depth of injury?

As congregations are slowly going into attrition, has the Church almost forgotten our First Nations residents and relatives here? How could we partner with them? As we claim our collective responsibility as the Church, how would your congregation take action?

Questions to Ponder

- In what ways do our theologies blind us from one another in this contemporary context?
- How does racism and internalized racism affect our repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery in this present day?

Additional reflection for Youth

The reading in John’s gospel is really about seeing an opportunity to all: that the Spirit works through us by our walking our talk or doing what we say is important. In other words if we want to be treated well, we treat others well and we don’t stand by and watch if others are being bullied or mistreated.

Be an “upstander” not a bystander, for those overlooked and passed by – especially Indigenous residents here who may be blinded by, and to, the Church and those who followed the Doctrine of Discovery and this way of privilege, hierarchy and displacement. American Indians were treated very badly and others stood by and did little or nothing to help.

Today it is important that we treat all people with kindness and fairness regardless of the color of their skin, their gender, religion, abilities or how much money or material things they have. We all need to be upstanders.

What would it take to listen to local Indigenous leaders to educate ourselves and others about the original names, languages, peoples of the geographic places, towns, rivers, hills rock features, etc.? What would it take to legally or at least informally change these non-Indigenous or misspelled Indigenous names back? Hold talking circle to discuss their meanings, values and stories if nearby Indigenous elders and communities can still be found. If not, then discuss why not.

SESSION FOUR

UNBIND LAZARUS

JOHN 11: 1-45; EZEKIEL 37:9B

Prayer⁵

*Great Spirit, fill me with your breath from the Four Directions,
bringing the four virtues of fortitude, generosity, respect and wisdom.*

Reflection

John 11:1-45 tells the story of Lazarus, who had been ill and died. His sisters, Mary and Martha, and their religious leaders were grieving for him. Deeply moved by their mourning for Lazarus, Jesus told them that Lazarus was just asleep, and instructed them to remove the stone away from his tomb! They hesitated, fearful that the stench would be overwhelming. But Jesus insisted, having told Martha earlier, “Your brother will rise again” (11:23), and reminded her to trust in seeing the glory of God. Indeed, when the stone was rolled away, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” (11:43) and he did! At this point Jesus gave a very significant instruction - “Unbind him, and let him go” (11:45). For though Lazarus was raised from the dead, his hands and feet were still bound with strips of cloth, which embalmed him like a mummy. Lazarus had to be freed of the bindings that kept him among the dead to fully live again.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, a vivid comparison of revival can be found in Ezekiel 37:9b with the valley of dry bones. The image of dry bones has served through the ages as a metaphor for many spiritual deaths. The prophet Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the breath that it will come from the four winds to breathe upon those who were slain that they may have new life. Yet literally not just symbolically, this soil here in the United States contain the remains of Indigenous ancestors, for at least 90% of the original population was lost to war and disease post-contact!

Today, what happens to the “dry bones” may provide a metaphor for the lives and cultures of many American Indians today – which are neither vanishing nor dead! Indeed, many American Indian nations are coming to life in new ways these days: the revival of their traditions by revitalizing their languages and teaching immersion classes for both children and adults. The power of the culture still lives.

There is still much to overcome, for the overlay of history, colonialism and imperialism can lead to the appearance of “dry bones.” While poverty and health issues may be addressed with economic development, other devastating realities such as drug addiction, meaninglessness, despair and particularly, teenage suicides continue to infuse hopelessness among too many.

Living under colonialism shatters both communal and individual self-confidence. For American Indian Christians, the Church is an ambiguous instrument. While the church participated in the genocide, it is also the conveyor of a faith and good news which could

⁵ Adapted from “Lakota Prayer,” *New Century Hymnal* #851.

nurture and transform their lives. Today American Indian Christians can claim both their traditional culture and the Christian faith without betraying either. It is a combination that can breathe new life into the communities.

Will the Church see the glory of God in the cultural revival of American Indians? And will the Church see this new sense of God's mission led by American Indians? How will the Church repent and commit to walking and sharing in a new redemptive way: removing the colonialist and imperialistic bindings of death, which the Church helped wrap, including the return of some land as an act of real restorative reparation not just an empty apology?

American Indians do not ask for white leadership to come in to educate them, but for the Church to help support this new sense of God's mission among their communities. The American Indian people with all of their gifts, particularly their traditions, will find a way to express God's mission in the context of their communities dealing with both the personal and justice issues of their life.

So, what could the Church do to unbind what the Spirit has raised up? In order for American Indians to claim a life that is fully alive, what would an equitable partnership look like? How do we engage each other with respect, prayer, a commitment to the sharing of resources, and in empowering and supporting ministerial and congregational formation?

Questions to Ponder

- The slow, incremental process of change to overcome history, colonialism and imperialism can lead to "unbinding Lazarus." Are the United Church of Christ and its members ready for such justice action?
- "For American Indian Christians, the Church is an ambiguous instrument. While the church participated in the genocide, it is also the conveyor of a faith which could nurture and transform their lives." What could this mean?

Additional Reflection for Youth

An Indigenous worldview teaches that we share breath and life with all our relatives – in a reciprocally responsible way. This session is about looking at how to remove the metaphorical bindings and stench of despair and death from one who yet lives – again as before.

Let us examine how complacency and privilege may bring continuing harm to others still bound. Because others are different they may not have the same privileges or opportunities I have so I need to work and maybe give up some things so that others may also have good lives.

There are lots of examples of complacency and complicity: from sweatshop labor so we can have lots of inexpensive clothes or good schools only for those who can afford to pay for them, to turning back indigenous children and their relatives at the border...and to support the struggle to maintain treaty rights such as the Idle No More movement here and elsewhere, etc.

SESSION FIVE

MANIFEST DESTINY NO MORE

GENESIS 12:1-9; JOSHUA 7-8

Prayer⁶

*Dear God, I promise not to abandon you in your hour of grief.
I promise to visit with you daily and to hold you on my heart and in my prayers.
I promise not to avert my eyes from the miseries that break your heart.
And, by endeavoring to truly love my enemies and wage peace,
I promise to do everything within my frail powers not to add to your distress. Amen*

Reflection

In Genesis 12:1-4a, God called Abraham to take his family and migrate to another land, pledging to make them into a great nation, and promised blessings to all the families of the earth. Family migration like that of Abraham was initially understood as God's call to an individual.

If one's ancestors emigrated from Europe to colonial North America, one may experience Abraham's call as a great source of comfort and a sign of God's faithfulness. Their ancestral migration to what would become the United State might have been seen as a call to the "New World" as "Promised Land." However, if one's ancestors had being traded as slaves and forced to migrate to the western hemisphere, then one would feel rather different with this passage.

In later generations after Abraham's, for example the Joshua generation, this sense of God's call to an individual came to serve in the nationalistic interest of expansion and conquest, with tragic consequences for Indigenous peoples already in the land.⁷ In fact, Abraham's journey through Canaan, according to the book of Genesis (12:6-9), was replicated in the general route of conquest, according to the Book of Joshua (see 7:2; 8:9, 30), that dispossessed the original residents Canaanites from the land.

In the early 1800s continental expansion of the U.S., not dissimilar to Joshua's conquest, the Supreme Court used the Doctrine of Discovery in *Johnson v. McIntosh* and claimed that the nation had inherited the conquest of Indigenous lands from the English. "Manifest destiny" came out of the Doctrine of Discovery, popularized the view that the U.S. was called by Providence to dominate the continent for its expansion, and justified the removal of indigenous people from their lands.

By repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, our eyes are opened to the other side of the idealistic picture of pilgrims in quest of religious freedom and a better life in the "New World." As we remove the romantic blinders of "manifest destiny," we see the brutal consequence of this collective idealism of "promised land" that resulted in the dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people, and in the continuous impacts on contemporary First Nations communities.

⁶ Nancy S. Taylor, *Stillspeaking Daily Devotional*, August 14, 2014. See *Resources*.

⁷ Pekka Pitkänen, "Reading Genesis-Joshua as a Settler Colonial Document," Oxford Old Testament Seminar on February 24, 2014. See also Pekka Pitkänen, "Pentateuch-Joshua: A Settler-Colonial Document of a Supplanting Society," *Settler Colonial Studies* (2013), DOI:10.1080/2201473X.2013.842626

What would be repentance for us today as descendants of pilgrims, settlers and immigrants? Abraham was called to move from a place of habit and familiarity, to a place unknown, yet sustained by God's faithfulness. Perhaps the call for us today is to move from the comfort zone of "common sense" bias and indifference, when it comes to the plight of American Indian communities. It is a call to a new place of humility, understanding, and solidarity and relationship.

As we face how generations of Indigenous peoples have been impacted by centuries of conquests, we can begin to realize that the descendants of settler and immigrants are also implicated in the benefit of such historic dispossession across generations. What, then, would repentance look like, in action, for the communities that you are in? Furthermore, what would the repentance of a nation look like?

Abraham's call was a command to give up his old identity, in order to covenant with God. He and his descendants would assume a new identity according to God's faithfulness to bless all peoples on earth. How did this blessing work out in the so-called "New World"? The Doctrine of Discovery and "manifest destiny" is the old American identity. What would a new American identity that truly blesses all people look like?

Questions to Ponder

A nation of immigrants overruns Indigenous inhabitants, looking for and trying to recreate an idealistic picture of religious freedom and a better life. The symbol of the Statue of Liberty stands hollow in the harbor "yearning to breathe free."

- What symbols in the harbors and settlements would you replace and with what for new immigrants to see?
- What identity would repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery give us?

Additional Reflection for Youth

Children are often more willing to step outside of their comfort zone to participate and to take risks. They have a sense of wonder and awe that we adults often lose with age. First Nations people taught their children that, if you take something from nature, you must give an offering, and thank that plant or animal for helping to feed, clothe or house you. Children were also taught that you cannot take what is not yours, nor can you give it away.

Imagine: you would not like it if someone came to your home and took your home and most of your belongings. This is what happened to Indigenous people in this country. People came to their homes, took the homes, the land and their belongings and made it very hard for them to live. Many of the Indigenous people actually died. Today we can help by educating ourselves about what happened and support efforts that ask not only for an apology, but also for some of the things that were stolen to be returned to American Indians.

RESOURCES

STILLSPEAKING DAILY DEVOTIONAL

BY KENNETH SAMUEL, AUGUST 18, 2014.

“When our fathers and mothers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles; they did not remember your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the Red Sea.” - Psalm 106:7

There is a certain sacredness that some people attach to antiquity. Many believe that just about any kind of well-established historicity deserves to be recognized and respected by all.

This is the mindset that prompts the governor and the majority of legislators in my home state of South Carolina to remain adamant in their refusal to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds. “The Confederate flag is a vital part of South Carolina history,” they say.

It is also the mindset that encourages Washington Redskins owner, Dan Snyder, to refuse to acknowledge the name “redskin” as a racial slur against Native Americans. In response to a letter from 49 U.S. Senators urging a name change, Redskins president Bruce Allen said that the Redskins name has been in place for over 80 years and it has always been respectful of Native Americans.

It’s one thing to honor the historical legacies of our fore-parents. It’s quite another to honor the historical legacies of our fore-parents in such a way that their moral sins and ethical transgressions are white-washed, overlooked and ignored.

The Psalmist is under no illusions regarding the past sins of Israel. If the Psalmist’s generation is to move past those sins, it cannot redact history and pretend that they never existed.

All of our individual and collective histories are rich, but none of them is pristine or perfect. Until we face fully all the self-contradictions of our fore-parents, we will never gain a clear view of ourselves.

Prayer

God, let honesty always accompany our homage. Amen.

RESOURCES

“RELIGION OF THE WHITE MAN AND THE RED”

BY CHIEF RED JACKET

Friend and brother; it was the will of the Great Spirit that we should meet together this day. He orders all things, and he has given us a fine day for our council. He has taken his garment from before the sun, and caused it to shine with brightness upon us; our eyes are opened, that we see clearly; our ears are unstopped, that we have been able to hear distinctly the words that you have spoken; for all these favors we thank the Great Spirit, and him only.

Brother, this council fire was kindled by you; it was at your request that we came together at this time; we have listened with attention to what you have said. You requested us to speak our minds freely; this gives us great joy, for we now consider that we stand upright before you, and can speak what we think; all have heard your voice, and all speak to you as one man; our minds are agreed.

Brother, you say you want an answer to your talk before you leave this place. It is right you should have one, as you are a great distance from home, and we do not wish to detain you; but we will first look back a little, and tell you what our fathers have told us, and what we have heard from the white people.

Brother, listen to what we say. There was a time when our forefathers owned this great island. Their seats extended from the rising to the setting sun. The Great Spirit had made it for the use of Indians. He had created the buffalo, the deer, and other animals for food. He made the bear and the beaver, and their skins served us for clothing. He had scattered them over the country, and taught us how to take them. He had caused the earth to produce corn for bread. All this he had done for his red children because he loved them. If we had any disputes about hunting grounds, they were generally settled without the shedding of much blood. But an evil day came upon us; your forefathers crossed the great waters, and landed on this island. Their numbers were small; they found friends, and not enemies; they told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat; we took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down amongst us; we gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison in return. The white people had now found our country; tidings were carried back, and more came amongst us; yet we did not fear them, we took them to be friends; they called us brothers; we believed them, and gave them a larger seat. At length, their numbers had greatly increased; they wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened, and our minds became uneasy. Wars took place; Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquor among us; it was strong and powerful, and has slain thousands.

Brother, our seats were once large, and yours were very small; you have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets; you have got our country, but are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us.

Brother, continue to listen. You say you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind, and if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter. You say that you are right, and we are lost; how do we know this to be true? We understand that your religion is written in a book; if it was intended for us as well as you, why has not the Great Spirit given it to us, and not only to us, but why did he not give to our forefathers the knowledge of that book, with the means of understanding it rightly? We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know when to believe, being so often deceived by the white people?

Brother, you say there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit; if there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the book?

Brother, we do not understand these things. We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers, and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. We worship that way. It teacheth us to be thankful for all the favors we receive; to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion.

Brother, the Great Spirit has made us all; but he has made a great difference between his white and red children; he has given us a different complexion, and different customs; to you he has given the arts; to these he has not opened our eyes; we know these things to be true. Since he has made so great a difference between us in other things, why may we not conclude that he has given us a different religion according to our understanding. The Great Spirit does right; he knows what is best for his children; we are satisfied.

Brother, we do not wish to destroy your religion, or take it from you; we only want to enjoy our own.

Brother, you say you have not come to get our land or our money, but to enlighten our minds. I will now tell you that I have been at your meetings, and saw you collecting money from the meeting. I cannot tell what this money was intended for, but suppose it was for your minister; and if we should conform to your way of thinking, perhaps you may want some from us.

Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors; we are acquainted with them; we will wait, a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.

Brother, you have now heard our answer to your talk, and this is all we have to say at present. As we are going to part, we will come and take you by the hand, and hope the Great Spirit will protect you on your journey, and return you safe to your friends.

RESOURCES

STILLSPEAKING DAILY DEVOTIONAL

BY NANCY TAYLOR, AUGUST 14, 2014.

“My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.” - Hosea 11: 8c-9

As the world erupts in genocide and epidemic, as the smoldering ashes of ancient enmities are fanned into raging flames, and as airplanes fall from the skies, our hearts break. Is there no end or limit to cruelty and the agony of human desperation?

Yet, if our human hearts wither at these miseries and hatreds, just imagine how God’s divine heart is faring. The Bible gives witness to a God whose heart breaks in consummate sympathy with her children who are broken and bloodied across the earth. God’s heart shudders at the relentless advance of Ebola among the world’s poorest and least equipped; at the plight of Yazidi refugees and the murderous hatred of ISIS. God’s heart faints at the sight of children clawing their way to safety at our southern border. God’s heart breaks with the parents of black teenagers cut down by officers of the law. God’s heart bleeds with the peoples of Israel and Palestine whose horns are locked in desperate and deadly combat . . . who are so cruelly bound to each other’s fates.

In the presence of God’s unspeakable pain, we are not without agency. It is on us, Christians, to keep vigil with and pray for God in this hard hour. Hold God’s broken heart on your heart. Bathe God in prayers of condolence as she weeps for her children who are dead, terrified, hate-filled, grief-wracked and perishing. Wrap God in bands of tender love.

Prayer

Dear God, I promise not to abandon you in your hour of grief. I promise to visit with you daily and to hold you on my heart and in my prayers. I promise not to avert my eyes from the miseries that break your heart. And, by endeavoring to truly love my enemies and wage peace, I promise to do everything within my frail powers not to add to your distress. Amen.

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