



The Sixth Sunday of Easter

“All in the Family”

Greetings Saints, it is great to be back with you again on this 6th Sunday of Easter. This journey of Virtual Services on Facebook Live has been an amazing one for me. Today is a bit of a milestone at All Saints because this is the 10th in our series of virtual service offerings and we are grateful to have you join us yet again this morning. Today we have some wonderful scripture passages to explore with you from the author Luke in Acts of the Apostles and from John, so let's get right to it.

One of my favorite things to do both theologically and scripturally has always been to see if and how critical pieces of the Jesus Way match up with traditional Indigenous, First Nation's Spiritual ideas and practices. In fact, as many of you know, before coming to All Saints, Mona and I were blessed to begin and serve a First Nations congregation at St. Peter's Episcopal Cathedral in Helena, Montana. This congregation, still active today, is named Togendowagan which means Awakening. The Awakening of our own personal spiritual journeys and the recognizing the communal truth of our interconnectedness as people. The Togendowagan congregation is built around this congruency of spiritual ideas between Christian and Indigenous pathways. The “Red Road” and the “Jesus Way,” it seems, are very much alike indeed. Let's have a look.

One of the many failures of the early Christian missionary evangelizers was to reject Indigenous spirituality outright as heathen and barbaric, incompatible with orthodox Christianity. Rather than attempting to gently graft jointly held spiritual ideas on to the already strong and growing indigenous spiritual tree, early evangelizers simply attempted to pull out generations of indigenous spiritual wisdom by the roots and replant Christian culture in its place. The attempted and sometimes regrettably successful cultural and spiritual genocide that resulted is still being felt today. However, the few missionaries to First Nations peoples who were successful, took the time to learn spiritual ways and ideas from their indigenous hosts and in that learning saw the “sameness” in the ideas. Then they successfully grafted, braided and blended the two spiritual pathways together. We have two beautiful scriptural examples this morning of that congruency of ideas between indigenous and Christian spirituality.

The first is from Luke in the Acts of the Apostles lesson. Luke is recounting the Apostle Paul teaching before a crowd of Greek scholars in Athens. After remarking on all of their shrines to various gods, even a shrine dedicated to the “Unknown God,” Paul preaches...

“The Creator who made the world and everything in it, does not live in shrines made by human hands. From one ancestor, all the Nations were created. Indeed, this Creator is not far from each one of us. For in Him, we live, move and have our being. This Creator gives to all...life, breath and all things.”

Paul speaks here of a personal, intimate and immanent God, a “right here” God, not an “up there” or aloof transcendent God in some far-off kingdom. This Creator who Paul is speaking of does not need to reside in a shrine, a temple or even a church. This is an “everywhere” God,

omnipresent as the theologians like to say. This God of Paul is all around us and in us.

Indigenous Elders speak in almost exactly the same way. The Wisdom Keepers tell us that we “walk through the mist of the Creator always.” We are surrounded by the Creator’s presence in the same way we are surrounded by the wind and the fog. Immanent, intimate, personal...*here*. Wrapping us, at all times and places, sometimes ignored, sometimes rejected, but always present for us to feel and know.

Paul says again, “Indeed, Creator is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live, move, and have our being.” When some little children asked a Lakota Elder where the Creator lived, his reply was so similar to Paul. “Little Ones, the Creator lives in the quiet place between our breathing in and our breathing out.” Again, Paul says, “In Him, we live, move and have our being.” Ancient Indigenous spiritual wisdom and original 1st Century Christian theology saying and believing exactly the same thing. This spark of the Divine is within us all. As George Fox, founder of the Religious Society of Friends, The Quakers, tells us, “That of God is in everyone.” As the Psalmists tell us, “We are made in the image and likeness of God,” and “While you were in the womb, I knew you and I knit you together.” We are “God Made.” Paul says again, “Creator gives to all, life, breath and all things.” “From one ancestor, all the nations were created.” We are all related in Paul’s Christian way thinking. Likewise, in indigenous wisdom we are all interconnected, as the Lakota say, “Mitakuye Oyasin.... All Are Related, All My Relatives. Tiyospaye my family, my clan. We are all cousins.”

This very simple idea of our relatedness to one another makes Jesus summation of Christianity all the clearer. Why do we *Love one another as I have loved you*? Because we are family. And we have that “spark of

the Divine” in us all. That of God in everyone, because, The Creator lives in that quiet place between our breathing in and our breathing out in us all.

But do we always treat each other as family? As a relative? A cousin? Sometimes...not always...never? Do we look at each other and see “otherness” rather than sameness? Do we see them and us? Both Paul and the Indigenous Wisdom Keepers tell us the same story, there is no “them.” There is only “us,” and our beloved Creator is always around us to keep reminding us, nudging us, poking us.

For in Him, we live and move and have our being. And finally, as John reminds us in our Gospel today, “You have received an Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Holy Spirit of Truth, abiding in you...always in you.”

Saints, we have all the tools we need all the time to live into the Jesus Way and The Red Road...the spiritual path of loving one another as family.

We are lovingly and blessedly made by our God. We are good by nature.

Our Creator surrounds us, intimately, immanently and passionately wanting to be in relationship with us. Always reaching for us, teaching us, wrapping us.

We are all related. We are family. Know it – Own it- Live it.

And our Advocate, the Sacred and Holy Spirit of truth fills us...abiding and residing in us.

God surrounding, Spirit abiding.

We are “All in The Family.”