

Service to Honor Indigenous People's Day
"Many Hands"
October 8, 2017
(c) Sylvia Stocker

Thought to ponder:

"Our language is beautiful. I remember the sound of the women talking at dusk, voices rising and falling like bird music, I tell you.

They sounded just like birds."

– Mihku Paul, Wabanaki Confederacy

Prelude: The Gathering Song, Mi'kmiq, performed by Muin'iskw

<http://www.muiniskw.org/Music/GatheringSongMuiniskw.mp3>

Translation: Our people are coming, right here, now.

A gathering is happening; we are all happy to see each other.

The spirits are coming, right here, now.

They know where they are going; their road is straight.

Our relations are coming, right here, now.

They will drum all night.

A New Beginning: Remarks Geared for All Ages

(c) Rev. Stocker

Welcome to the first Indigenous People's Day service since the Brunswick Town Council ruled that the second Monday in October would be known henceforth in Brunswick as *Indigenous People's Day*.

That's a big, long word, "indigenous." What indigenous means is "native." So Indigenous People's Day celebrates the people who are native to this land. Now, you might think you are indigenous if you were born in Brunswick or even in Maine. Specifically, however, Indigenous People's Day celebrates the first peoples ever to inhabit this land – here in Maine, the Wabanaki, "the people of the dawn," the people of the old days, before white, European people came here, and the people of today – the Wabanaki descendants who live here still.

Sometimes it's hard to imagine what a place might be like in any other time but now. What was it like before? Before there was a Pleasant Street or a UU church? A downtown mall? Before there was even a Maine Street?

It depends on how far back you go. In the Ice Age, three million years ago, Brunswick was covered with a mile of ice. Can you imagine it? And then, as the ice began to recede, seeds of new life began to sprout, and green began to cover the land. Where did the seeds come from, after over two million years of ice? From sheltered, isolated pockets of land, that, despite all odds, continued to support life during the Ice Age. Such isolated places are called *refugia*, a word that shares the same root as the word “refuge.”

Well, birds and animals, including humans, began to populate the area, too, around 10,000 years ago. Imagine 10,000 years. The descendants of those first people go back **500** generations or more. Can you imagine such an ancient connection to this land?

A little more than 400 years ago, the first Europeans arrived. They came armed with guns, and also with the belief that the land they occupied was given to them by God. They bore new diseases, like smallpox, which made the first peoples sick and sometimes die. They believed the indigenous people they found here were called “Indians,” instead of their tribal names, like Abneki, Passamquoddy, Adroscogin, Maliseet, Penobscot, Mi'kmaq. They thought those “Indians” were a threat to be removed from the land. Most of the native tribes did not survive the European assault. They died of disease and from the ongoing war on their people. Gone are their languages, their cultures, their world views, their wisdom. So this land carries ashes as well as seeds. Can you imagine what that was – and is – like for the indigenous people? Can you imagine the stain on the souls of the white Europeans who overtook and colonized this land? Can you image what we have all lost?

But descendants of those first people are still here: the Micmacs, the Maliseets, the Passamaquoddy, the Penobscot. Still here, protecting and preserving their culture, despite ongoing efforts of white culture to disrupt, destroy, and erase their communities. They are still here.

Brunswick has set aside Indigenous People's Day as a time to learn, to remember our history the way it really happened, to honor the cultures of the indigenous people of these lands, and to discover ways to right the wrongs of both past and present. I see it as a small new beginning.

Maybe one day our whole nation will observe Indigenous Peoples' Day. Maybe one day our whole nation will undertake the effort to heal from the past.

Imagining and trying to understand the past is a worthy exercise. So is trying to imagine the future, to dream something better into being. Here's the future I like to imagine: A world where people and cultures are accepted, honored, valued for who they are. A world where everyone has the opportunity to grow and thrive. A world where, instead of divisions and walls, human beings build bridges to one another. A world where relationship and community are deeply shared values – where “lone wolves,” or even loneliness and disconnection are all unusual, all aberrations, because the community wraps its arms around people who suffer alone. A world where human life, where all life, is regarded as sacred: where, when I look at you, I see the face of the Holy, even if you seem different from me – especially if you seem different from me.

Can you imagine it?

To build that world, we need to learn from one another. Today we will be learning from a Penobscot story about a girl who makes traditional baskets. (Note to people reading this sermon: The book was *Many Hands, a Penobscot Indian Story*, By Angeli Perrow, Illustrated by Heather Austin. Check it out of the library if you haven't read it!) To set the story in context, let's look at a short video that describes what making baskets means to Maine's indigenous people. In this video, a basket maker by the name of George Neptune, explains the story of how basket making came to be.

Video Meditation

George Neptune, basket maker

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bJ3Q_LpIIA

Litany

“Remember” by Joy Harjo

(Congregational Response: We are earth.)

Leader: Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.

Congregation: We are earth.

Leader: Remember your birth, how your mother struggled to give you form and breath. You are evidence of her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.

Congregation: We are earth.

Leader: Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them, listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the origin of this universe.

Congregation: We are earth.

Leader: Remember you are all people and all people are you.
Remember you are this universe and this universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

Congregation: We are earth.

Closing Words

As we go forth,
may we remember to find the bridge
that connects us to our neighbors,
may we remember to see where injustice thrives
and to lend our voices and hands to the work of change,
may we remember to listen for voices that have been quieted,

may we remember to keep our hearts open,
may we remember to face difficulties as one human family,
may we remember to listen for voices that have been quieted and watch for those who have been
cast aside,
may we remember a new world awaits us
and that we can begin to build it step by step.