



# WITH CREATION

A NATIVE AND INDIGENOUS  
LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

UNBOUNDED



# INTRODUCTION

My Indigenous heritage comes from the Akimel O’odham (Pima) and the T’hono O’dham (Papago) of southern Arizona through my father and from the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) of north-central Idaho. Having grown up in Phoenix, Arizona, I can speak to the experience, a bit, about the desert (wilderness).

Contrary to the biblical narrative, the desert is only a wilderness unless you don’t know where you are going or what provisions you should take along with you. It therefore strikes me as awkward that the Son of God is being seen as “wandering” or that “fasting” equals somehow starving and about to drop dead.

When one “fasts”, it’s usually considered a sacred and purifying time preceding a spiritual rebirth for a fasting period. Adolescent young men were expected to venture into a mountainous area today known as Pilot Rock, an ancient vision quest locale for the Nez Perce Tribe which is now a sacred heritage site. They only took water with them. They sought a guardian spirit which would remain with them for life, sometimes their names were changed to pertain to this animal spirit.

In the “desert wilderness” described in the New Testament, Jesus encountered Satan, the evil one, who attempted to catch him at his most vulnerable – to tempt him toward sin. The sins of self-indulgence, arrogance, and greed. Focused upon deception, corruption of human traits; to think, wish and feel. Attributes from within the mind, soul, and heart which Jesus alluded to in the Great Commandment.

Indigenous peoples of the American southwest wouldn’t have, nor do they now, see their environment as “wilderness”, something to be afraid of or avoided. It is their homeland. It has been for thousands of years. Why couldn’t Jesus have gone into the forests of Lebanon, the coastal plains of the Mediterranean? We don’t know.

Jesus’ confrontation with Satan was necessary for the human nature in Jesus to overcome the temptations and willingly choose humility and sacrifice. Was it the necessary next step after taking upon himself the visible form of God among human beings? He was baptized but didn’t have to be.

The Bible connects fasting to prayer, but it is not just sacrificing food; it includes prayer, repentance, and heart-searching. It had to be done for the right reasons and in the right way. Jesus taught that there is a right way to fast and a wrong way. Matthew 6 tells us that fasting can be a form of religious hypocrisy, like giving to the poor and conspicuous praying. He condemns fasting that is done with the intention to be seen as “holier than thou”, action done so all may see. The true fasting should be done in silence.

The series of events from Jesus baptism to temptations in the “wilderness” shaped Jesus as a person. He was called by the Spirit in baptism, tempted in the wilderness to betray his calling, then acknowledged God’s pathway – he remained faithful to his purpose, his

ministry. These events allow us to see how we, too, can answer the call God puts inside each one of us. Jesus, the Son of Man, had to struggle with the same fear and insecurity that we all have. And in the end, his full trust in God, the Father, is our inspiration.

This isn't about temptations, sinfulness, or heavenly strength. Jesus's temptation in the wilderness is told to remind us about our relationship with God, our human relationship with the knowledge that we are never alone and that we don't have to face trouble, fear, heartbreak, and temptation on our own. We admittedly do not have confidence about that. We are not confident in the fact that we never travel the road of life alone. Therein lies the purpose of the "wilderness" of Jesus' temptation. We walk through considerable wilderness at one time or another; pastors, teachers, Sunday school teachers, moms, dads, and teenagers struggling to understand not only themselves but larger issues of faith and relationship with God.

My father comes to mind when I think about faith and relationships with God. He was descended from two tribes and grew up on a reservation just south of Phoenix, Arizona. Life was hard being the youngest of nine-children who were all eventually sent to an Indian boarding school run by the Presbyterian Church in Tucson. A place where their cultures, languages, lifeways, and religions were forbidden. He went on to study for the ministry and was called to Idaho, among the Presbyterian churches on the Nez Perce reservation, to serve as their minister. My parents married, had eight children by 1965 then divorced. He raised eight of us alone.

We were in the church each Sunday, participated in many programs and received a solid Christian upbringing despite my father's endless shifts at the Phoenix Indian School, where he worked for seventeen years in the boy's dormitory system. Two of us younger ones had to live with older cousins and their families until we could attend school. We didn't have much, but we had love, meals (meager as they were) and a roof over our heads.

What temptations to make his life easier did my father have to deal with? What shortcuts could he have taken to provide for us daily? We will never know. But one thing we do know is that he did everything he could to ensure we had a safe, clean, home, attended school, did our homework, and saw six of us graduate from high school and some from college. I think he realized that God was taking care of us and a relationship with God would see him and us through the rough patches and we all saw it happen.

Lent is a challenge, and many of us don't like change. We don't like challenges to our status-quo. My wife and I have used the same cell phone company since 2001, have lived in our home for fifteen-years and though we are on our third and fourth dogs, we continue to make sure they are cocker spaniels. We can be predictable, I suppose, but we like things as they are.

The world is changing. Society is changing. And so have we. New directions for the ministries we are involved with occur regularly and we both adapt and see God's wisdom within it all. We are surprised to see where God shows up.

And so my twenty-second Lenten journeys is upon us. And one thing we are all clear about is that we are challenged to live into the unknown, to continue sitting at the feet of Jesus and to discern his directions in our lives. You see, only God knows what this

year's Lenten journey will bring us. But there is a promise he makes: That he will sit with us, walk with us and if need-be, carry us when we just can't seem to go another step. But God also makes a very important promise too: God will never leave us alone. I have been there, and God has been there too.

Our faith journeys will always be through some kind of "wilderness", but I am always reminded of my father's journey and mine, the good days, and the worse days. God has always been there. Through the voices of others and through his presence in my life.

God's love, presence, and faith in us is true. Our Lenten journey begins. I am thankful for it because once again I am reminded that we never walk alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

- Rev. Irv Porter

**MATTHEW 6**  
**ASH WEDNESDAY**  
**JAY MERCADO**

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21*

Every day the world bombards us with an endless conveyor belt of new possessions and experiences to enjoy. At times it seems this culture of treasuring is not merely a lifestyle choice but is rather necessary to participate in society. Capitalistic pressures encourage productivity, valuing people for what they are able to produce and severely hindering our ability to experience true rest. Stress, negative self-image, and anxiety are compounded by the constant turning of the gears.

Lent becomes increasingly valuable as these cultural impositions persist. Lent is an ancient practice that defies the current logic of our society. Where the elevation of the self and inflation of the ego reigns, Lent invites us to the secret place to commune with God in a most intimate way. We see the tearing of clothes, the grand gestures outside our windows, people parading themselves to be seen. Lent asks us to deny and examine the self, to refrain from something, to learn the discipline it takes to move against the current.

It may be a small gesture. It may be a favorite drink or monthly expense. It may be more time spent with family or unplugged from the wear of social media. Whatever our choice may be, I encourage us this lenten season to make a humble offering. Matthew 6:21 encourages us that the posture of the heart matters more than how much we are able to give. Our sacrifice can undermine itself when it models the world that says bigger is better.

As we make a choice to abstain, from something big or small, my hope for you is that you would increase in love, in contentment, in joy. While we may be watching less TV or enduring a serious craving for certain food, my hope is that we recognize the areas of abundance that are irrevocable. God’s love for you abounds. God is stretching out Their hand to you that you might see a different way than our society prescribes. There is never any need to withhold self-love, the meeting of our own needs, whether physical or emotional. The idea is not to do harm for the sake of our faith. God is pleased when we reflect Their example of compassion, intention, and grace. For some, myself included, it is much easier to extend these things to others than to ourselves. Maybe then the invitation at this time is to give up on our negative self-talk or performance avoidance. It can be a time to try and fail miserably, knowing that we are just human beings and fulfillment is not tied exclusively to completion or mastery.

As we press into the intimacy of knowing God with fewer and fewer distractions, our hope for the world must abound – that the chaotic world outside might set down what is burdening them and accept an easier yoke. We cannot persist in this way and the Creator is grieved to watch what is most precious to them toil the arid ground, knowing that so little fruit is produced in this manner. We cannot look down at the world for choosing differently, but we can respond to the wind of God urging us to uplift our siblings. The oppressive, capitalistic venture pales in comparison to biblical rest, contentment, and love that provides for our neighbor.

However you choose to engage this lenten season, I pray that God would illuminate anything that deserves attention or compassion within you. As we refrain from certain things, may we also embrace the life abundant afforded to us in Christ, an abundance that does not fluctuate based on how much

we possess. Our walk up to calvary can be a transformational experience – my sincere hope is that The Presence would abound at every turn, emitting warmth and leading us all into deeper understanding.

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IIWAA (Piipaash/Quechan) is a performer, songwriter, and recording artist representing District 7 of the Gila River Indian Community. They are the recipient of the 2022 Viola Award for Excellence in Music for their debut EP, *Dysphoria*. IIWAA has been featured on the Native America Calling radio show, the CBC, and recognized by the Grammys Recording Academy.

**GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7**  
**1ST SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**RANDY WOODLEY**

2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

3:1 Now the serpent was craftier than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

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Is it possible for us to understand story from a different perspective? We may not realize how much "perspective" we actually bring to the story. Worldviews are the unseen and often unconsidered lenses through which we process and interpret the world. This week's reading will help us consider and become more aware of how the Western worldview may be forming us. Within the legacy of settler-colonialism exists the false mingling of the Western worldview with a Christian worldview. Our own worldview is often hard for us to spot until we learn more about other ones, like an Indigenous worldview. We should also realize that worldviews are often something that we experience as being intuitively correct; meaning our view is the right view. Shall we let the journey of this week begin by allowing God to dislodge some of those intuitive assumptions?

Western worldviews have grown out of Greco-Roman influence that may have begun with the Philosopher Plato. Plato separated the idea of a thing from the thing itself, creating a duality between a thing's ethereal essence and its material existence. Platonic dualism privileges the ethereal over the material. Platonic dualism became the basis of reality in the Western world.

Plato's student was Aristotle. Aristotle's student was Alexander the Great and he was, among other things, a world promulgator of Hellenism or Greek culture. Hellenism was spread by Rome and then Great Britain, and later romanticized in the West as the ideal form of civilization. It included concepts of categorization that became a part of Western systems of "progress." Western Christianity and American systems of thought inherited and embraced the false value of separation of reality (ethereal over material) rather than embracing a whole reality. In the Western mind one's "correct" beliefs even can equate with action. The result for many Christians since, has been a disembodied theology, rife with dualism and only faintly resembling the teachings of Jesus.

Although Hellenistic influence is found in the New Testament, Jesus did not seem to be terribly affected by it. Perhaps his rural Galilean childhood kept his more Hebraic and holistic worldview intact. A number of Church Patriarchs however, were influenced by Greek dualism that directly shaped the church. Platonic dualism became even more distinct during the Enlightenment or Age of Reason. The Founding Fathers of America and other American thinkers, (the Church included) were directly shaped by Enlight-

enment-bound thinkers.

All that to say, from a Native American perspective, the journey to the cross may look different than from a Western perspective. Instead of one simply focused on personal sin and redemption, it is a journey towards a new worldview that begins with the earth itself. Instead of an individual journey, could this journey be one of collective repentance from a consumeristic way of relating to God's creation? About living WITH the earth instead of ON the earth? Could we move towards a new framework for our relationship with Creator and creation by understanding Jesus' role in creation? Could we understand our role as not OVER creation but one WITH creation?

If we remove the influence of Platonic dualism from our worldviews, we will find it difficult to view human beings as being over all other parts of creation. Instead of a relationship where nature is below us, we should be co-sustaining, all creation. Each area of creation is working with the Creator to maintain earth's balance. The rain and snow, oceans and sun all sustain life on earth. Animals regulate each other within their various natural cycles. Plants provide oxygen, food, and shelter for all of creation to coexist together. As human beings, we are co-sustainers with the rest of creation to ensure the abundant life for all creation the Creator intended. And God said that is "very good."

Jesus understood humanity's relationship with the earth differently than we do. He spoke to the wind, to the water, and to trees; closely observed the habits of birds, flowers, and animals; and called his disciples to model their lives after what they saw in nature. In Matthew 5, during his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool" (34b-35a). Jesus was making a point about making vows, but one of the many byproducts we see from this short exchange (and from his whole life) is Jesus' view of the whole world, including earth and heaven, as sacred. Jesus understood the balance between the earthly and the heavenly realms, and he certainly understood the relatedness of both ("on earth as it is in heaven"). Jesus was firmly planted in the construct that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."

In our scripture passage human beings are placed by their Creator in a garden. The measure of this great gift should not be overlooked. Everything we have comes from the earth; God's first gift to humanity. The earth is sacred. The earth is our first and most abiding teacher. It means something special, when the same one who moves from Heaven to Earth, from a particular life lived and a particular kind of death, when we realize, that it was he, Jesus, who had the efficacy of creating the earth for us. The giftedness of our role in caring for the garden as co-sustainers is only equaled by the rest of Jesus' whole life story.

When considering our relationship to the earth, followers of Jesus should also understand him as earth's Creator and Sustainer (John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1), and simply cooperate with Jesus in the task of caring for the whole community of creation. Our role, as humans and the task of those especially who follow Jesus, is to maintain the natural harmony and balance God set forth in the garden.

The serpent's role in the story is what Native Americans call "the trickster." The trickster's role is most often to tempt us to do that which we know we should not do. Trickster stories is how we learn from our own mistakes and the mistakes of others. In this case, the mistake was to misuse the earth by eating from a forbidden tree. The whole community of creation is present in the garden to bear witness to the human's misuse of creation.

Western civilization is just beginning to realize that nature is wiser and more powerful than we are and will, without a doubt, outlive us. She knows her mind, and she understands what keeps life in balance. Because today we seldom see nature in her unmolested glory, we rarely consider the degree to which Western civilization has changed that which is natural to what is now unnatural. Since time immemorial,



Indigenous people have learned to observe natural change and tried to flow with it, or bend it to their benefit. It is now imperative that the West discover the same truth.

To begin to follow Jesus on his path to the cross, means we must begin with his act of creation. As the story goes, humanity has been placed in a garden. The earth and the whole community of creation is our garden. God's purpose for us all is to place us within the community of creation as co-sustainers; bringing about harmony as it was in the beginning when God said, "it is very good." Regardless of what aspect of the community of creation we work with, be it peacemaking, water restoration, human trafficking, houselessness work, renewable energy, reforestation, etc., we are to bring about healing and harmony to the whole community of creation. This is what it means to follow Jesus on his path.

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**Rev. Dr. Randy Woodley, PhD** has been referred to as farmer, author, activist, scholar, distinguished speaker/teacher, and wisdom keeper. He has been quoted in venues such as *The New York Times*, *Politifact*, *Time Magazine*, and *The Huffington Post*. Randy addresses a variety of issues concerning American culture, our relationship with the earth, and our spirituality. Dr. Woodley currently serves as Distinguished Professor of Faith and Culture at Portland Seminary and Director of Intercultural/Indigenous Studies. Raised near Detroit, Michigan, he is a Cherokee descendant recognized by the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. Randy co-hosts the *Peacing it all Together* podcast with Bo Sanders. Dr. Woodley and his wife Edith (E. Shoshone) are co-sustainers of Eloheh Indigenous Center for Earth Justice and Eloheh Farm & Seeds, a regenerative farm, school, community and ceremonial grounds in Yamhill, Oregon. His books include:

- *Becoming Rooted: One Hundred Days of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth*
- *Mission and the Cultural Other: A Closer Look*
- *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview: A Decolonized Approach to Christian Doctrine*
- *Decolonizing Evangelicalism: An 11:59pm Conversation*
- *The Harmony Tree: A Story of Healing and Community*
- *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*
- *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity*

A few examples of Randy's contribution of chapters to other's works include "Poverty and the Poor Among North American Indigenous Traditions," (*Poverty and the Poor Among the World's Religions*) and "How Indigenous Perspectives Offer Hope to a Besieged Planet," (*Time to Act: Extinction Rebellion*). Dr. Woodley served for several years on the Oregon Department of Education, Native American/Alaska Native Advisory Board (2015-18). He and Edith served together as members of the Native Climate Council of the Greater Portland Metro Area, Advisory Board (2015-17) and in 2021 they were given the Ecumenist of the Year Award by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the first time given to a couple. They have four grown children and six grandchildren.

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# 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

## LENORE THREE STARS

*Mitakuyapi, Wicahpi Yamni emaciapi.*

Greetings, my relatives, my name is Lenore Three Stars. I am Oglala Lakota, one of the seven bands of the Oceti Sakowin or the Seven Council Fires, also known as the Great Sioux Nation. I was born on Pine Ridge Reservation in S.D., where my father was born. My mother is Minnecoujou Lakota, also one of the 7 bands, from the Cheyenne River Reservation in S.D. Our ancestral lands include He Sapa, the Black Hills, sacred land where our creation story lives. Psalm 121:1,2, reminds me of our homelands, "I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

When I meet other Native people, they ask, "where are you from?" What they are really asking is, "who are your people?" My answer also tells them how I am connected to the land. I take time to properly introduce myself in the context of kinship because the Lakota family system, the *tiospaye*, is foundational. It teaches us to practice relationships of respect and it shapes our kinship roles and responsibilities.

May I note here that although I am Lakota, I cannot speak for the Lakota, or for any of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the U.S.

### WORLDVIEW

Worldviews are important. You have one. When I call you *mitakuyapi*, "my relatives," I am sharing a Lakota worldview of kinship.

*Mitakuye Oyasin* is a Lakota worldview. The words translate to "all my relations," meaning that we are all related. We are related to Creator, to each other and to all parts of creation. In this kinship paradigm, no one form of life is above the other and there is no hierarchy of importance. We are interrelated, interdependent and responsible to the other for balance and harmony.

In the Lakota way, we are related to all creation, not just to humans. For example, we are related to the Buffalo Nation, the Winged Nations, The Water Nations, the Star Nation and even to some elements of weather. When we hear the first spring thunderstorms, we say *wakinyan agli*, the thunder beings are coming back, bringing the water needed for new life. When we call all parts of creation our relatives, we draw respect and harmony into the relationship. To live into the worldview of *Mitakuye Oyasin*, we do all we can to be "a good relative," which dovetails with "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

This relational worldview is biblical. In Genesis 12:1-3 and in 28:14, God made a promise to Abraham and his sons: your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Romans 8 tells us that the Spirit of God brought about our adoption as children of God and that creation is waiting alongside us for healing and restoration. We are all related.

There is no such thing as a culture-free gospel because we all come from somewhere that shapes our worldview and forms the lens through which we see and experience life. I make this point because

most of the misunderstandings I've had in culture and theology stemmed from a difference between an integrated indigenous worldview and a dualistic Euro-western worldview that colonized this country. I bring an indigenous perspective to Creator's relationship to us and the earth.

## **CREATOR JESUS**

Native believers who follow the Jesus Way often speak of Creator. To me, Jesus is Creator because of the agency of Jesus in the act of creation. John 1:3 says, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." Colossians 1:16 says, "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him. Scripture describes the presence of the trinity at creation when the spirit hovered over the waters. This speaks to the inherent community of the triune God, which is the design for how we in creation live best.

## **THEOLOGY OF THE LAND**

A recurring spiritual theme is our relationship to the land. Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament scholar, writes that our first questions as a human being are, "who are we, where do we come from?" He says that the Hebrew creation story in the Old Testament "affirms a peculiar relation between God and the world." This speaks to a worldview about one's place in the world and one's relationship to God.

Genesis 2 offers a theology of the land in the second Hebrew creation story. Adam was created from "adamah," the land, and Genesis 3:19 tells us, "You are dust and to dust you shall return." Our Lakota word, "Oglala" translates as "scatter one's own." To pantomime an understanding of this, a Lakota elder made the motions of sprinkling herself with earth to indicate that we are people who come from the land. The Lakota often refer to earth as Unci Maka, "grandmother earth," a kinship term of deep respect.

Indigenous peoples have long held a theology of the land that connects them to their ancestral lands in a reciprocal relationship. Reciprocal means that we don't take from the land without giving something back and we don't take more than we need.

Each creation story for Native peoples places them in a particular geographical place; it is not portable. This sense of place is foundational to Native identity. The land is their spiritual connection to place. The historical removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands devastated this spiritual and cultural connection. I imagine that at one time, in their own homelands, the settlers had a deep connection to their ancestral lands. But that relationship was severed when they left their homelands for whatever reason, and I suspect it caused an unresolved land trauma for them. They tried to fill that void with a quest for property by taking our ancestral lands, but only a relationship to the land will satisfy the spirit. We still need a holistic healing of land trauma for all peoples on Unci Maka.

Indigenous people see a further correlation between how the earth is treated and how women are treated. Since the Doctrine of Discovery, the ideology of dehumanization and extraction has devalued Indigenous bodies, cultures, and the land. The ongoing epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women screams injustice. Scripture relates that the land can become defiled by the actions of peoples and the land can vomit them out. (Leviticus 18:24-30).

## **GOOD NEWS**

The good news in John 3:16 (Message) says, "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an



accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.”

Creator, incarnated as a manifestation of love (God is Love), came to put the cosmos right again. The cosmos includes the whole of creation, not just humans. In Genesis 1:31, the maker of the universe, who holds all power in heaven and on earth, looked upon a completed creation and deemed it wholly and profoundly good.

Creator Jesus so loved all creation that Jesus died for all creation. We saw the response of creation when Jesus died – the sky went black in the middle of the day, the earth shook, and the rocks split. Jesus will put the cosmos right again. Creator uses love to heal and restore, and we can choose to cooperate with that plan. We were created in Shalom and to Shalom we shall return – to a profoundly good creation.

The Spirit of God goes where it wills, always working out a healing purpose. We can be what one of our elder calls, “hollow bones,” a conduit for the power of love. Mitakuyapi, we can choose to be good relatives and restore places of harmony with the land. That’s one way you can love your neighbor as your relatives. We can also call, write, and work towards just structures, like fair housing, equity in education, food security, and sustainability in creation care. Love works hard.

From a Lakota perspective, life is a sacred circle. Living the good news is not about a linear orthodoxy of waiting for a restoration at the end. It’s about a continuous orthopraxy of being a good relative now.

*Prayer: Creator, wopila tanka eciciye – Creator Jesus, we give you all our gratitude. Thank you for the love you have embedded in creation: Love above us, Love below us, Love all around us. May we be compelled to do justice with you, love mercy with you, and walk humbly with you.*

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**Lenore Three Stars** (Oglala Lakota) retired from a federal civil rights career in Seattle, moved across Washington state to be Unci (grandmother) to her (takojas) grandchildren, and began a journey to decolonize her theology. She earned an M.A. from Portland Seminary in Oregon in conjunction with the North American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies.

Lenore facilitated Journey to Mosaic trips with the ECC Pacific Northwest Conference, served as a Commissioner for the Washington State Human Rights Commission, and sits on boards related to her interests in indigenous issues, justice, and creation care. She speaks, writes and teaches from a Native perspective on decolonizing theology and racial justice. One of her favorite roles is cohort leader for “Decolonize with Badass Indigenous Grandmas” ([liberatedtogether.com/cohort](http://liberatedtogether.com/cohort)).

**JOHN 4:5–42**  
**3RD SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**DANNY ZACHARIAS**

In the Gospel of John 4:5–42, we read of a remarkable encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan Woman. Jesus and his disciples are traveling through Samaria. While this was not an altogether uncommon route for Jews, we do know that Jewish travellers would often make the slightly longer trek down into the Jordan Valley in order to avoid Samaria. Jesus sits by the well and waits as his disciples go off to find food. As the sun sits high in the sky, a Samaritan woman comes along to fetch water, and Jesus proceeds to converse with her. Men and women sitting by a well was the ancient equivalent of match.com — this portrayal is setting the reader up to expect a betrothal (see Gen 24:10–51; Gen 29:1–20; Exod 2:15–21). Instead, a dynamic exchange occurs between Jesus and the woman that runs headlong into the issues that divide them as people – their ethnic divide that has resulted in past and current hostilities as well as the important question of where the proper place of worship is. Suffice it to say, there are numerous historical and cultural dynamics at play in this interchange.

A recent book by Caryn Reeder called *The Samaritan Woman's Story: Reconsidering John 4 After #ChurchToo* re-examines this passage of scripture. One of the valuable contributions of this book is the historical tracing of different interpretations of the Samaritan – these interpretive threads through church history continue to the present day. Of these interpretive threads the most common is the understanding that this woman was a lousy sinner, or as some modern preachers have crassly put it, the “town whore” (see Reeder, pg. 19, 76). Indeed, this may be the only way that you have heard this story preached and taught. This popular understanding is shocking to me as a biblical scholar. Why is this so shocking to me? No where in this text is she called out as a sinner! And Jesus has no problem in the Gospel of John in calling out people's misdeeds (John 5:14, 8:7, 19:11). Furthermore, the Gospel of John plays with the theme of darkness and light through his narrative. Whereas the religious teacher Nicodemus came to Jesus in the cover of night and displayed a profound lack of understanding in John 3, this woman encounters Jesus in the light of day and displays profound insight and understanding. Not only does she have an intelligent encounter with Jesus, but as Harriet Livermore stated in 1824, she is “the first Samaritan convert to the Christian faith, and by a woman the proclamation was given first in the city Sychar, that Messiah was come” (quoted in Reeder, pg. 175).

What then of the issue of her divorces? On this, I think we can reconstruct a healthier understanding of this encounter. First, it is clear that she is being displayed through the passage in a positive light. This means that when she responds “Sir, I see that you are a prophet” (John 4:19), that she has correctly discerned the reason for bringing up the divorces and current co-habitation. She correctly discerns Jesus's point in bringing up the issue – he is a prophet, NOT a judge. Second, we do not know a lot about Samaritan theologies and practices. But their closest religious relatives, despite the vitriol, were the Jews. The Samaritans held to only the five books of Moses as scripture, and in the Mosaic Law there are some clear teachings on divorce. But scholars also know from this time period that there was a debate in Judaism on divorce. Essentially, one school of thought (the Hillel school) allowed a man to divorce his wife for virtually anything that dissatisfied him, while a second school of thought (the Shammai school) argued that divorce was only allowed in cases of adultery. Jesus enters into this debate elsewhere in the gospels (See Matt 5:31–32 and 19:1–9) and clearly aligns himself with the Shammai school of thought. This debate was far from settled in Christ's day, and he makes clear statements about divorce to make clear how this should be understood.

If this Jewish dispute is a plausible reality in the Samaritan context (and I think it is), then the picture in John 4 becomes clearer. Jesus is NOT calling her out on her sin, but calling out an unjust patriarchal practice that has placed all of the power in the hands of husbands to divorce a woman for any reason that suited them. Confirmation of this is simply in the fact that she did remarry. Jewish practice during this time, stemming from the Mosaic law, was that a certificate of divorce needed to be provided by the husband so that a divorced woman could marry again — and certificates of divorce were not given when adultery was the grounds of divorce.

Jesus is not rubbing sin in the face of a woman he just met. He is, rather, shedding light on an unjust practice that left her helpless to the whims of men and a religious community that propped up this behavior. And finally, Jesus recognizes that she now does not even have the security that betrothal provided women of that day. She lives with a man who will not marry her. She has longed to build a life with a faithful husband, and this has not happened. Jesus does not confront her at her greatest point of sin, but steps gently to encounter her at her greatest point of pain. She has been victim to a system stacked against her. Jesus doesn't forgive her. Jesus liberates her. A woman who has been used, abused, passed along, and silenced now finds her voice and her confidence. She is known, and she is loved.

I cannot help but wonder, and lament, at the theology of modern preachers and teachers who have asserted that all of the blame is on this woman and that Jesus confronted her with it at the outset of their meeting. What does this say about their Christology? We don't need to wonder much about it, as our theologies quickly become how we live out our faith. If Jesus approached this woman with a legalistic ethic, then why shouldn't we also call out people's sins and shout our disdain from the street corners or the twitter-verse? But, if Jesus instead displayed a relational ethic that listened to her story and spoke to her with dignity and compassion? Well, that changes everything.

So let's go forth and do likewise. Make the uncomfortable step to encounter people that we may otherwise want to avoid. Step tenderly and with respect into places of pain and unjust circumstances in the lives of others. Let's not be afraid to expose unjust systems and practices that are oppressing others. And let's help others to find their voice. The Samaritan woman's voice was heard not in spite of her circumstances, but because of them.

"Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony...They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world,'" (John 4:39, 42).



**Danny Zacharias** is a Cree-Anishinaabe & Austrian man originally from Winnipeg (Treaty One territory), with ancestors also residing in Treaty Two, Treaty Three, and Treaty Five territory. He lives now in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia) with his wife and four children, and is Associate Dean and Professor of New Testament Studies at Acadia Divinity College.



I SAMUEL 16:1-13 – PSALM 23 – EPHESIANS 5:8-14 – JOHN 9:1-41

# 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

## ERIN SHAW

It is difficult to get away from our beginnings.

I'm thinking about this a lot lately. The experiences and places that exist within our foundational years are deeply embedded in the fabric of who we are and how we approach the world. I am looking back on my beginnings and letting them teach me in new ways.

I was raised in an old rock house that sat on 400 acres in Hughes county, Oklahoma. My mother inherited the land from her grandmother. The house was built from large limestone blocks quarried from the land by Native Americans removed there in the 1800's. Our home was originally used as a Native American schoolhouse and the acreage was a part of my families original land allotment. The land was a tangible connecting point between me and my ancestors and I will always be grateful that this was the place of my beginnings.

As a child, I had free roam of that land. It was expansive, seemingly without border. I explored every inch of those 400 acres as if it was my full time job. I was a wide-eyed little girl, taking in the created world with awe and reverence. Everywhere I looked the land was constantly evolving, dying and being reborn in a cyclic persistence that I would learn early in life. I discovered the limestone creek bed dry to the touch one day, overflowing and swiftly moving the next. The ponds, frozen over and thick enough to walk on would soon give way to a swimming hole in the summer months. The fields full of Indian Paintbrushes, glowing red and swaying in the Oklahoma wind one day, but soon barren and empty. Nothing stayed the same, every day looked different but was all incredibly interconnected. As a child, I saw the world as whole, connected, always in relationship with something else.

I received all that information, wisdom and beauty through my eyes. I learned that creation was always speaking, always revealing a greater mystery. I uncovered deep wisdom that existed within every living system surrounding me. The things I saw with my physical eyes, on that land, in those early years developed something in me. I'll never be able to separate my adult self from that curious little girl finding incredible delight in creation. What my physical eyes saw in my beginnings formed my spiritual sight to this day.

But this is the way it is, isn't it? In our lives, there is a profound connection between what we see or experience and what we believe. What we experience dictates how we interpret the world in which we live. Our visions dictate how we embody our lives on earth. Simply put, it matters what we see or experience. It matters where we are looking. It matters how we are looking. And it matters that Creator transform our physical senses so that we may truly see.

In John 9, we read the story of a man born blind. Jesus encounters the man, heals his eyes and restores his vision. As the Pharisees greet the healed man, they were suspicious and concerned. They did not know Jesus or understand how he had healed the man's eyes. The Pharisees repeatedly ask questions, "How did your sight return to you? How were you healed? How do you now see? What did he do to open your eyes?"

The blind man responds, "all I know is that I was blind, but now I see."

As the Pharisees are hurling insults and mocking the healed man, Jesus tells them: “I came so that the blind may see.”

Jesus came so that the blind may see and experience.

What is it we see? How does our spiritual sight direct our lives? Are we truly seeing? Does our spiritual lives need healing? Where do we look for wisdom?

From my beginnings, God was teaching me that creation was God’s first message. Christ is deeply embedded in all things and the incarnation is a process unfolding throughout time. God seems to have chosen to manifest the invisible in what we call the visible. As people of “the book”, we often overlook the first discourse of God: creation. As a child, this discourse was teaching and guiding me in wisdom, beauty and inspiration, much like it had my ancestors before me. I am grateful for this gift and the way it has formed me.

Jesus came so that the blind may see. What we see matters. What we experience matters.

*“No one longs for what he or she already has, and yet the accumulated insight of those wise about the spiritual life suggests that the reason so many of us cannot see the red X that marks the spot is because we are standing on it. The treasure we seek requires no lengthy expedition, no expensive equipment, no superior aptitude or special company. All we lack is the willingness to imagine that we already have everything we need. The only thing missing is our consent to be where we are.”*

— Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*

Creator, we know that wisdom sits in places. Show us where to look or where to be.

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Erin Shaw is a painter of borderlands, the spaces between worlds. As a visual storyteller, the child of an Oklahoma farm, Shaw tills the rich soil of dichotomy through her masterful uses of color, iconography, and story. As a Chickasaw-Choctaw artist, she creates in a state of tension, suspended between two worlds where both solemnity and humor pervade her art. She finds that truths are revealed in unanticipated ways, and trickster often appears throughout her work. The artist earned her BFA in studio art from Baylor University and her MFA from the University of Oklahoma. She is Assistant Professor of Visual Arts at John Bro

**EZEKIEL 37**  
**5TH SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**MEGAN KRISCHKE**

*Why involve me? I entreat Creator. Surely, Yahweh who said, “Let there be light!” and there was light, could say to these bones, “Live!” and they would live. I am wholly unnecessary to this transformation.*

*So, why involve me?*

*Why make me walk among the dead? Why immerse me in the overwhelming suffering of my ancestors? Why immerse me in their utter destruction and unfathomable pain? The bones, the death, go on as far as the eye can see. Aren't the weight and sufferings of my own life, of my own time in history, heavy enough? I have been removed from my land, my people live under the rule of people who care nothing for our future. Why then, must I also remember and carry the pain of my ancestors?*

*“They were praying for you,” Creator says, “while their bones still had flesh, while their lungs still had breath—they thought of you and your children and prayed. They prayed into the seventh generation. Will you be the answer to their prayers? They hoped for you—can you hope for them? Just as they carried you in their hearts, won't you carry them in yours?”*

*“As Creator, I live outside of time. For me time doesn't pass but extends. I can and will extend your prayers to them. They will live again and their life will bring you life.”*

\* \* \*

There's so much talk about generational trauma—about how the trauma our ancestors experienced is passed down to us. But more and more I hear people saying, if there is generational trauma, isn't there also generational hope and generational healing? The hopes of our ancestors have come down to us. Might it be possible for Creator to extend our prayers for healing and life back up the line?

Is the thought that we, today, can heal our ancestors with our prayers sacrilege or heresy? Or is that what is happening in Ezekiel 37? Perhaps Ezekiel's vision is purely metaphor, but perhaps, it is deeper and more mysterious and more powerful than that.

I have my own Ezekiel 37 stories—stories where I felt Creator's invitation to enter into both the pain and the healing of my ancestors. I admit up front that these experiences are enigmatic to me and don't fit easily into the theological constructs with which I am familiar. It is possible that they too are purely metaphorical. Even so, during both experiences I very much sensed the Great Spirit's presence and guidance.

Though I have encountered numerous boarding school stories that are heart wrenching and horrific—most of them are—there was one story I came across that got to me in a different way than most. I was so troubled that I couldn't go on with my life for days. What finally brought me out of the breath-sucking grief was the spirit leading me to pray for that child and offering me hope that the prayers I prayed over a hundred years later could still make a difference for that child. That child who was also an ancestor. I prayed that his spirit was able to leave his body and be held with love by Creator while the abuse occurred and that the Restorer of All Things would miraculously make his body new before his spirit returned. I left that time of prayer with my broken heart soothed and reminded our Jesus who suffered at



the hands of abusers and mockers does not hide his face when we are suffering but joins it. It reminded me of what feels to me like the truest promise in all of scripture—"The Lord is near to the broken hearted, he saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18). That child, and none of the children taken to boarding schools, were alone in their suffering--the One who created them and loved them never left their side

I had a second Ezekiel 37 experience while visiting Haskell Indian Nations University. I was on campus praying with a couple campus ministers. As we prayed I saw the quad filled with the Native children from the era that the campus served as an Indian boarding school. The scene wasn't extraordinary, I could just see the children standing there in their school uniforms. But after that, something unusual started happening: every time I closed my eyes to pray I could see a young boy from that scene standing next to me and looking at me somewhat expectantly. The longer he appeared, the more curious the situation became to me. Was this small figure a ghost? I have no working theology around ghosts! And why this particular child, was he perhaps a direct ancestor of mine? As I began sharing this situation with friends and seeking their thoughts, a wise young woman said to me: "Have you asked Jesus how he wants you to respond to the boy's presence?" I had not, but when I did, Jesus told me to take his hand and walk him home. So I returned to the image in prayer, took the boy's hand and told him I was going to take him home. The final image that came to me in prayer was of the two of us walking hand in hand into the sun sitting on the horizon. I came away from that time of prayer with a deep sense of assurance that the boy made it home and was welcomed into loving arms.

These experiences are mysterious, and my theology around them is speculative at best. But what I see in these stories and what I see in Ezekiel's story of the valley of dry bones is that our prayers and the truth that Creator gives us to speak matters to the healing of historical trauma. They also show me that Creator hasn't forgotten our painful histories—that not only our pain, but the pain and suffering of those who have already walked on, is close to his heart. He doesn't look at our pain and the pain of our ancestors and say: that was a long time ago—you need to get over it.

Instead, he invites us into a process of healing. He invites us to join him in setting things right. In speaking his words of life and truth. As Ezekiel sees the wasteland of destruction, dishonor, and death transformed and as Creator gives transformational power to Ezekiel's words, how could he himself not be transformed? How could Ezekiel not experience deep healing—his arms strengthened, his breath deepened, and his hope renewed.

There is an approach to prayer ministry in which the person being prayed for is invited to bring up a memory of the past and to ask Jesus: "Where were you when this was happening.?" I have only ever seen this practiced with a personal story, but I am curious what would happen if we brought the painful stories of our ancestors before Creator's throne and asked Jesus: Where were you when my family was forcibly marched from their homelands? Where were you when my great grandparents were forcibly taken from their families and neglected and abused at boarding school? Where were you when those children who were raised in boarding schools had children of their own, but had no parenting skills? Perhaps if we risk traveling to those places of pain with the Lord's hand upon us, he will show us something new, perhaps he has words for us to say that bring restoration, hope, and life.

I think too, not just about our ancestors who have walked on but of our elders who are here with us now who feel cut off and without hope. How are we being called to care for our elders whose hearts and souls are broken. Can we, the younger generation, enter with them into their places of pain and speak words of life and healing to them? Can we speak wholeness and peace and freedom and joy over them and expect to see it? Can we bring them home by being family to them? Might the words that Creator gave Ezekiel to speak over his people also be the words he is giving us: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I

have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

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**Megan Murdock Krischke** is a citizen of the Wyandotte Nation. She lives in Tulsa on the traditional lands of the Caddo, Osage, and Kickapoo with her husband, Will, and two children Flannery and Soren. Megan is the director of the collegiate ministry, Native InterVarsity, and looks forward to the day when Indigenous people find it laughable that Jesus was ever considered the white man’s God.

**PSALM 118:1-2, 19-29, MATTHEW 21:1-11**

# **PALM SUNDAY**

## **RON MCKINNEY**

Palm Sunday, a day recognized by Christians around the world as the Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Many congregations will begin their Sunday Service processing in and waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna. Others may pass out the palm branches during the children's time and fold them into crosses to hang on their walls at home to remember this day throughout the year. It is a day of great celebration, when the Jews welcomed their King into their city, and a celebration for us, as we welcome the king into our lives. It is a story that is told year after year, to the point that most churchgoers can recite the story by memory. And this is where we must be careful as readers and hearers of this story, that we do not overlook the message(s) within the message in this pericope. By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus displays his understanding of the history of the Jewish people and the traditions they practiced of the humility and servanthood of a leader, a king. There is something to be said about doing things in the old way, without to say it. Have you ever seen or heard something being done the Old Way that gave you a sense of approval and pride? Maybe you even gave it a nod of approval. These were important cultural characteristics for a leader to possess, but it was not only Jesus that displayed these characteristics. There were un-named disciples that played an important role in making this Triumphant entry happen. How many times are we called to do works that may seem only a small portion of the overall ministry, and sometimes goes unnoticed or unrecognized?

Nestled deep among the hardwoods and pine trees of southeastern Oklahoma, our Choctaw congregations were tucked away in the hills along rivers and springs that often attributed to their names. The rest of the state affectionately referred to this region as, "The Sticks". At one point in time, they were known as the Choctaw Presbytery. Since that time, the churches continue to be yoked together and often have weekend long meetings called Conventions. These conventions not only gave the people an opportunity to worship together, but to report about their ministries, and to connect the people to one another in a unique cultural way. The local church hosting the conventions always made sure that the visitors were taken care of, throughout the weekend. The host congregation would put together a Committee on Local Arrangements to welcome the people and let them know about what had been prepared for them. Back in those days, many people would spend the night at the host church, often times sleeping on the church pews or in the Fellowship hall. Blankets and pillows that had been gathered from the members were brought together at the sleeping areas and made available to the people. If the weather was cold, there would be a person in charge of stoking the wood heater to make sure that everyone was warm and comfortable. The committee also let the people know where to find the restrooms, and where they could get coffee or water, or a snack at the family camp houses that encircled the church, in the same way traditional Choctaw villages were setup. There were men and women, young and old who supported the convention by providing and preparing meals for the guests at no charge. When the committee gave their welcoming report at the opening of the meeting, it was usually done by someone speaking in Choctaw language, and making sure that everyone felt welcomed. And even though the committee's tasks were not the focus of the convention, they were an important part of the cultural identity of that congregation's ministry.

Matthew goes to great lengths to establish Jesus' identity as a person who understood and followed the Jewish traditions and practices, as described in the Old Testament. Beginning with the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew refers to Old Testament prophecies when it comes to significant moments in Jesus' life and ministry. So while Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on a donkey in a display of humility and servanthood,

we cannot overlook the message of the un-named disciples who were obedient to the task Jesus had charged them with. Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for those disciples who walked with Jesus? When I first started reading the bible, I used to think how great it must have been to be with Jesus and know everything about him and his ministry. But I soon realized, that was not the case. The disciples did not always know what Jesus was up to, or asking them to do. Imagine you were one of the un-named disciples that Jesus sent to bring the donkey. They did not know what was going to happen, or what their actions would lead to. But they were obedient. We have history on our side, so it's easy for us to say, I would go and get the donkey. But the disciples were not as fortunate. They were living it day by day, not knowing what was about to happen, and not always understanding what Jesus was asking of them, or where he was sending them. They had to trust that the words Jesus gave them to say would be enough. By faith they stepped forward, even though they remained unnamed in the gospel.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday and enter the final week of Lent, let us reflect on our journey that has brought us here. What will we have gained from our 40 days of prayers and devotion? I invite you to take a moment to revisit this story and determine who you identify with: the unnamed disciples sent to get the donkey, the people who questioned the disciples, Jesus, the people who spread their cloaks and palm branches along the route shouting Hosanna, or the people who asked, who is Jesus? What is our role in helping fulfill Jesus's ministry? Are we willing to do those tasks that we may not fully understand yet we feel compelled to do? This story does not end in the pages of the bible, but continues today. We become a part of the story, by answering the call of Jesus to servanthood, even when we go unnamed.

*Prayer: Creator God, you call us to into your service through your son Jesus Christ who sends us out into the world. Help us to be faithful, humble servants that we may be a part of your bigger plan for your kingdom here on earth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*



Since 2012, **Ron McKinney** has been serving the students at the Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, KS, in a variety of student support services roles. During this time, he has maintained his membership as a Pastor At Large from Dakota Presbytery where he currently serves as Moderator. In the past few years, he has served the PCUSA as Vice-Moderator for the Native American Consulting Committee, the Doctrine of Discovery Native American Council, and Pastor Advisor for the American Indian Youth Council.

Ron and his wife the Rev. Danelle Crawford McKinney met while in seminary at Dubuque, and are proud parents of three children, Alethia Oatman who lives in Kamiah, ID with her husband Jacob and their two sons Jaren and Ashton, Madison who resides in Lawrence, and Ronston who will be graduating HS in May.

Ron is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and grew up attending the Oka Achukma (Good Water) Presbyterian Church near Broken Bow, OK, where he was ordained. In an effort to reach out to the elderly and others who may not be able to attend church and to help preserve the Choctaw language, he posts readings from the Old and New Testament in the Choctaw language and shares songs from the Choctaw Hymnbook on his Facebook page.



PSALM 36; ISAIAH 42; JOHN 12:1-11  
**HOLY MONDAY**  
**LAURA CLARK**

## Out of the Hollows

I love to name things. All sorts of things, like new businesses, fresh stories, puppies, a friend's artworks. I sometimes have an idea for an invention and part of the fun is giving it a catchy name, although I've never built a prototype for any of them. As a maker of many things, creating something from a place of unknowing and naming it is like a christening, a defining moment that says, "This is alive, this exists." And such are moments in our lives that emerge to be remembered. They say to us, "This is real. This experience has purpose. Name me." Recently, I had one such moment, which in its naming, found a place of consecration.

I offer the title, Out of the Hollows, to carve out a vulnerable, sentient experience. I chisel its name deeply like a memorial stone for myself and for any who might pass this Way. In oral tradition, literature, and media, the idea of hollows—those glacier-carved valleys of deep woods and widening rivers—are often living apertures into the stuff of dreams and story. Hollows remind us of mysterious, dark forests whose thick, overarching trees hasten the journey of wayfarers, or dripping, concrete underworlds of today's urban fantasy. They represent worlds of things dark, things hiding, things unknown.

This naming came easily from a surprising revelation. Whether provided by Creator, Son, or Holy Spirit (I rarely know the Who of these things at the time), the wonder of it spoke in its imagery. I pondered it as if it were a parable calling, "Look! Here's something just for you," within its shadows. It came one morning while I was quiet, contemplating Christ's words to his disciples that the Kingdom of God is within. Head tilted back, eyes closed, I silently prayed, "Is there something within, something I need to know today?"

Immediately, my mind was drawn to the center of my body where I 'spiritually' gazed, eyes still closed, upon an image of a cave. It was clearly a rock formation with walls and ceiling, a jagged, cave-like space, empty and dark. Indeed, it was hollow. I had a knowing that some things had once filled it but had died there. What were those things? Dreams that had withered long ago, brown and paper-thin, as frail as violets? Overambitious work that had burned up all the oxygen in the same way it had burned me out? Failures that had scorched the walls and evaporated, disappointments turned to dust? As quickly as the image appeared, it disappeared.

I replayed the image in my mind, this rock-hollowness, this dark space, this cave within. The answers to my questions were obvious. Yes. And yes and yes and yes. All that. I'm sure, more. It wasn't sorrowful. It wasn't regretful. It just was. The place where things hidden give up and die. I inhaled a slow, deep breath, and if you can believe it, I knew the timing of the revelation was connected to this devotion. There was a promise, somewhere from a place of unknowing, in Holy Monday.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Psalm 36:9

These words grabbed me from the reading. When your heart leaps and you hear it say, "I believe that," believe that! I read it again: from the depths of our being in him springs a fountain of life, a light that causes us to see light where there was no light. Like a composer who rushes to a piano, I turned to the rest of the reading and wrote the words of Psalm 36:5-7 to make it my own:

O Love that never ends  
From earth to sky like wind that touches everything  
Is in everything, IS everything  
Your faithfulness expands to the highest clouds  
Your righteousness like mighty mountains steadies me  
As we are plunged deep in Righteous Love  
And emerge from your sea as Love  
How precious is your love, O Trusted One!  
Close to your breast, within your wings, we are safe.

O Love that never ends... O Trusted One... Your righteousness like mighty mountains steadies me. I was deeply stirred in my heart while my mind was blown away. You must understand, it had been a very long time since I had been deeply stirred. It was so clear. He desired to pull me from my hollow places, expand me far beyond my hiddenness. And I was reminded of another cave. It was a tomb, a new tomb, cut out of a rock for the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. At the end of Passover week, it would become the dark hollows of Jesus' tomb.

Jesus knew about tombs. He had visited one not long before and shocked a crowd by calling his friend, Lazarus, out of his tomb. No small miracle after decomposing for four days. Imagine that night they were together again in Bethany, Lazarus—newly raised from the realms of the dead—and Jesus, placing his ultimate trust in Father that he, too, would soon defy death. Lazarus' sister, Mary, bowed at Jesus' feet and poured a whole pound of very costly oil, pure 'nard' or 'spikenard', on Jesus' feet, lovingly wiping them with her hair. The whole house exploded with a beautiful fragrance (John 12:1-11). This oil is mentioned only one other time in the Scriptures, in the first chapter of Song of Solomon. In that passage, the bride's fragrance of nard also filled the room where her beloved king was at his table.

"This is for my burial," Jesus prophesied to the dinner party. I'm sure you could have heard a pin drop. He leaned back in the awkward silence, not threatened by darkness, by aloneness, by death, by a grave sealed in stone. He trusted down to his very core the reality penned by another prophet, Isaiah:

Thus says God, the Lord,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:  
"I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;  
I will take you by the hand and keep you..."  
-Isaiah 42:5-6

He was confident in the Love that never ends. From earth to sky like wind that touches everything, he knew the God who is steadfast, who is faithful. He created the heavens and stretched them out and they are still expanding in this very moment. And we are expanding because of his breath and his spirit.

I am grateful for the imagery of the empty cave where dreams died and ambitions failed. There nothing dark remains, nothing is hiding or unknown. This unusual revelation was an act of Love so that I can

emerge from a sea of Love. Life bursts forth from our tomb! Hand in hand, Creator fills our hollow places and together, we chisel out the memorial stone for others who pass this Way, the stuff of dreams and story.

On this Holy Monday, in his light I see light. Out of the hollows, I arise.

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**Laura Marshall Clark** is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and independent curator, interdisciplinary scholar, and author. She is a lecturer at the University of Houston in Native American spirituality and was a Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Ireland at the University College Cork in 2021, teaching Native American literature. Clark was the 2019 Scholarly Fellow at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and most recently, curated two Indigenous fine art exhibitions in Oklahoma and New Mexico in 2022.

Clark earned an M.A. from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, in Native American studies and B.A. in political science from East Central University in Ada, Okla. She has been a consultant to state and tribal programs, museums, and businesses through her company, WildHorse Consulting, LLC.

**ISAIAH 49:1-7, PSALM 71:1-14, I CORINTHIANS 1:18-31; JOHN 12:20-36**

# **HOLY TUESDAY**

## **CHRIS HOKLOTUBBE**

### **Consider your Call**

Recently, a friend of mine, Dr. Casey Church (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi) shared on social media that he was feeling down as he reflected upon the challenges he was facing in ministry. In his post, he expressed his frustration and dissatisfaction with just how many obstacles he faced throughout his decades of labor in contextualized Indigenous ministry. His post surprised me, because I consider this friend an accomplished scholar and a practitioner of Indigenous missiology. Casey has trail-blazed numerous inspired and creative paths for Indigenous Christians to follow who want to follow Jesus and maintain and/or revitalize their Indigenous ceremonies and rituals (see especially his book, *Holy Smoke: The Contextual Use of Native American Ritual and Ceremony*, Cherohala Press, 2017). Currently, Casey leads a new church plant that serves both Natives and non-Natives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, called “Good Medicine Way.” Each Monday evening, inspiring services are held in-person and stream over Zoom and Facebook, worshiping the Creator through drum-led singing, reflections on creation, and messages that speak to the Indigenous experience. And yet, here was a social media post naming a frustration that anyone in ministry can relate to, especially those in Indigenous ministry.

In my travels interviewing Indigenous ministers and researching Indigenous interpretations of the Bible, I have encountered many disheartening stories of non-Indigenous Christians undervaluing and undermining the work of contextual ministry as a heretical and syncretistic threat to the “purity” of the Gospel (or I should say, a modern Euro-American expression of the Gospel). For example, in the opening chapter of his book, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys* (IVP Books, 2015), Richard Twiss (Sicangu Lakota) copies emails he received from a representative of a Christian outdoor facility who canceled his reservation to use their grounds to host Wiconi Family Camp, an Indigenous, Christian retreat that Casey now runs. The Christian owners of the facility worried that Richard and Casey were “taking the indigenous people back to paganism, shamanism, false gods, and the occult” (p. 18). For some Indigenous ministers, the emotional scars from Christians telling them that their ancestral ceremonies and rituals do not glorify God are still tender.

But this wasn't all that Casey shared. Casey also posted a picture that someone shared with him of a silhouette of a strong, Indigenous warrior. Imposed on this picture was an encouragement to continue to fight, especially when it is hard, because that is what warriors do. Casey's honest and vulnerable post about the difficulty of ministry, especially when its sacrificial service and results are ingloriously lambasted, questioned, and even threatened, resonates deeply with the lectionary today that asks us to “consider our call” to glorify God (1 Cor 1:26).

The prophetic voices in today's lectionary give voice to the timeless and universal frustration servants of God have felt in the face of what often seems to be insurmountable odds. In Isaiah 49:4, the suffering servant, Israel, groans: “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity” (Isaiah 49:4). The Psalmist bemoans: “For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together. They say, “Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver” (Psalm 71:10-11). The Corinthians, to whom the apostle Paul writes, seem to have been pelted with messages that their understanding of Jesus and his work on the cross is foolish and should be abandoned (1 Cor 1:18-31). And Jesus himself, having just been welcomed into Jerusalem like a tri-



umphant military leader (John 12:12-19), identifies the stark opposition he faces and the disturbing fate that awaits him at the culmination of this Passover festival. “Now my soul is troubled,” Jesus sighs, “And what should I say—’Father, save me from this hour’?” In such dark moments, our troubled souls are in good company.

But this is not all that Scripture shares. The suffering servant announces, “surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God” (Isa 49:4). This representative of Israel finds strength in the poetic recognition that he was formed, even in the womb, for his present task (Isa 49:5) and from this mindset, refocuses his attention on his mission “to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel...[to be] as a light to the nations” so that God’s salvation and healing harmony might bless every nation (Isa 49:6). Reading this passage from an Indigenous lens, I can’t help but call to mind the life-giving ministry of Casey Church and the legacy of Richard Twiss to raise up and revitalize tribal communities and practice such that they might experience a restored shalom and harmony of the Creator. The Psalmist echoes Isaiah’s servant poetic recognition that the Creator knows and has known us deeply, even from the womb (Isa 49:5; Ps 71:6), to call to mind the Lord’s long care and provision in their lives. Despite their trouble and amid pleas to not be forgotten or forsaken, the Psalmist doubles down in their prayers of gratitude and glorification of God (Ps 71:8). Paul seeks to embolden the Corinthians’ faith and self-worth by admonishing them to “consider [their] own call” (1 Cor 1:26). Paul effectively coaches his audience to set aside any feelings that they are imposters, inadequate, or are foolishly laboring in vain. Rather they should rest in the knowledge that they have been chosen by God (1 Cor 1:27) for a mission that is incomprehensible to people who think they have the monopoly of piety, power, and wisdom. Again, I can’t help but read Paul’s admonitions here and not recall Richard’s email correspondence and how many Christians have long criticized the “foolishness” of Indigenous glorification of God. And lastly, Jesus, upon reflecting on whether he should shudder and ask to be relieved from the difficult task set before him, boldly declares: “No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27–28). And suddenly then, as if to add an exclamation point to this dramatic scene, a thunderous voice breaks in from the heavens, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28). We are not alone in our calling to glorify God and the fruit of our labor are not simply ours to nurture or harvest alone. God is powerful enough to glorify God’s own name and to tend to the fruit, it is our task to be dutiful to the call.

I return to my friend Casey’s social media post which touches on a timeless and universal feelings of despondency and doubt that we all face in the face of hardship and struggle—doubt in ourselves, doubt in the meaning of our mission, doubt in the significance of our labor, doubt in our safety, doubt in wisdom of our teachings. As we journey through Holy Week and enter into the story of Jesus and the tremendous hardship that awaited him in his coming crucifixion, we are invited to find strength both in Jesus’ confident courage as well as in the resilience, faith, hope, and courage that resounds through the echoes of witnesses to the Creator’s glory that reverberate throughout Scripture.

Fellow journeyers, know that your doubt and despondency is seen, know that your calling is dignified, and continue in your duty to glorify God in the manner that you have been called. Remain faithful in your duty, being strengthened in the knowledge that you have been chosen for precisely this task. Continue to fight, even when it’s hard, because that is what you have been called to do.



**T. Christopher Hoklotubbe** (Th.D. New Testament and Early Christianity, Harvard University, Divinity School) is Director of Graduate Studies at NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community and Assistant Professor of Classics at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Chris is of mixed-Indigenous and settler ancestry, and a proud member of the Choctaw Nation. He is the author of *Civilized Piety: The Rhetoric of Pietas in the Pastoral Epistles and the Roman Empire* (Baylor University Press, 2017) and is currently co-writing a book with Cree First Nation New Testament scholar Danny Zacharias, entitled, *Reading the Bible on Turtle Island: North American Indigenous Interpretations of the Bible* (InterVarsity Press). He has served as an elder in the PC(USA) (Fourth Presbyterian, Boston) and finds joy in his family, including his wife Stephanie and two young daughters, Claire and Emily.

ROMANS 12; MATTHEW 5; ISAIAH 58; JOHN 11  
**HOLY WEDNESDAY**  
**TERRY WILDMAN**

**Weeping with Those Who Weep**

*“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Romans 12:15 NASB*

*“Dance with the ones who dance for joy, and shed tears with the ones whose hearts have fallen to the ground.” Romans 12:15 FNV*

*“Creator’s blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears, for he will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them.” Matthew 5:4 FNV*

Lent can be a time to lament, not just our own sorrows, and not only for what our Native people have lost—but what Creator has lost. And in the end, what all of the Western World has lost in the ravaging of hundreds of cultures with their languages, dances, arts, and worldviews.

In my Christian tradition, I was not raised to participate in Lent, or in many of the other worldwide faith traditions based on the Christian calendar. So I find it humbling to write a few thoughts on this ancient practice.

Like many First Nations people, I was not raised in my culture and have had to reconnect with the help of mentors and elders over the past 25 years. This experience has helped me to appreciate ceremonies and rituals. I am now beginning to engage with long-established Church ceremonies and rituals such as Lent.

Ceremonies and rituals help us remember our spiritual roots. In my understanding, the most important Christian ceremony is Holy Communion. In the words of Jesus, “do this in remembrance of me.” In our Native cultures ceremony and ritual serve the same purpose, they help us remember our spiritual ways and reinforce our sacred teachings.

Lent provides us with a shared time of repentance, of rethinking our lives in the light of Jesus’ teachings and example, with a focus on the 40 days he spent in the desert wilderness of Judea fasting and praying. In our Ojibwe teachings, this would be similar to what is sometimes called a vision quest; a time to fast, pray, and seek one’s life purpose. Through this, we learn what our gifts are and how to lay down personal desires to serve the community.

I like how Lent inspires us as a worldwide body of believers in Jesus to participate yearly in this kind of remembrance. We remember what Jesus did and follow in his footsteps in personal ways.

Lent inspires a strong focus on repentance. When we read the story of how John the Baptist called Israel to repentance, we see that people came confessing their sins. I always thought they focused on their individual sins, perhaps lying, stealing, or cheating. I would like to suggest that in the spirit of Daniel, they were also confessing the sins of their Nation and the effect those sins had on all the people—and how they misrepresented God (See Daniel 9).

So, as valuable as it is to focus on our own spirituality and repent of personal sin, we should consider a larger way to understand what we “repent of” during Lent.

I have heard Lent called “The Great Fast.” Fasting is an integral aspect of the Lenten journey. Fasting sets the stage for repentance.

So why does Creator call us to fast? It appears that just the act of fasting, humbling ourselves, and going without is not the primary purpose. It doesn’t seem to be about us.

Creator speaks through the prophet Isaiah and clarifies Israel’s misunderstanding of the call to fast: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”- Isaiah 58:6-7 NIV

I hear Creator saying that fasting, literally going without food or some other kind of privilege, helps us to identify with those who do not have the privilege and advantages some of us enjoy. Through fasting we can begin to identify with the pain of others, the grief of others; to spur us to pray for the oppressed and do something to help.

John in his Gospel story tells of the time that Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, was sick and died. When Jesus arrives and sees the family grieving, he identifies with their sorrow and loss. Then we read, “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35).

Jesus was weeping with those who weep.

I would like to share a personal story where I and my wife experienced something similar.

On Wednesday, June 6th, 2012 my wife Darlene and I attended a yearly ceremony hosted by the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan called Honoring, Healing, and Remembering. The purpose was to honor and lament the memory of the Indian children of the Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial School—those who were abused and died there, and the families affected, even to this very day. And to acknowledge the pain and suffering—so that healing can take place. In the tribe’s own words: “We recognize the suffering, strength and resilience of the children through a day of memorial and fellowship.”

As we listened to the Elders share the memory of the abuse and pain inflicted on the innocent children incarcerated there—we could only silently weep. The boarding school ran for 42 years—1892 to 1934. The Elders told us of the time Native parents would come to pick up their child only to discover, upon arrival, that their child had died earlier in the year.

On the day we were there they announced the names of 158 Native children who had died at that boarding school. During the ceremony they called out the name of each child followed by a single honor beat on a large Native drum. In between each beat you could hear the elders weeping.

I was born and raised in Michigan, the land of the Anishanabeg: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. I could hardly believe my ears as we listened, learned, and looked into the faces of the Elders as they choked out their memories. It was a time to “weep with those who weep.”

“We are forgiving the unforgivable” one Native Spokesperson announced.



In the American church today there is a lot of hype and triumphalism preached from pulpits and televisions every Sunday. A lot of talk of rejoicing and overcoming but little about tragedy, grief, weeping, and sorrow—a very real part of our humanity.

Jesus wept as he stood before the grave of Lazarus and listened to the expressions of sorrow from the family. It moved and troubled him as he felt the very real pain of our human existence. Their sorrowful faith moved him to action.

There is a time to weep.

America and its churches need to take time to confess, repent and mourn the loss of thousands of Indian children who died in the over 500 boarding schools. And lament the emotional, physical, sexual and cultural abuse that brought devastation on our Indigenous Peoples disrupting family structures and nearly wiping out languages, traditions, and way of life. These government authorized schools were often run by churches. Mt. Pleasant school was run by Methodists. The Catholics run Holy Childhood of Jesus boarding school in Harbor Springs which was the longest running school closing in 1983. American Indian Boarding schools became a template for Canada and Australia.

I know that Jesus, the man of sorrows, was there on that Wednesday weeping with us all at the devastating misrepresentation of his love. The only solace I can find is that when he suffered on the cross it was to expose and absorb the injustice and pain of sins like this, and show us how to forgive and make sure this never happens again. This gives me the hope of restoration, where Creator will give “beauty for ashes.”

Lent can be a time to lament, not just our own sorrows, and not only for what our Native people have lost—but what Creator has lost. And in the end, what all of the Western World has lost in the ravaging of hundreds of cultures with their languages, dances, arts, and worldviews.

*I am one who weeps.  
I cannot stop the tears that are falling from my eyes.  
Will no one come near to comfort me?  
Is there anyone to lift up and restore my spirit?  
My children are undone.  
My heart is on the ground.  
For the enemy has come and he has walked over us.  
- Lamentations 1:16 First Nations Version*

*Miigwech Bizindowiyeg (thank you for listening).*

*Gitchi Animiki Meno Mashkiki Manido (Voice of Great Thunder with a Good Medicine Spirit)*



Terry M. Wildman, of Ojibwe and Yaqui ancestry, is the Lead Translator and Project Manager of the First Nations Version. He serves as the Director of Spiritual Growth and Leadership Development for Native InterVarsity. He's also the founder of Rain Ministries and has previously served as a pastor and worship leader. Terry and his wife live in Maricopa, Arizona, on the traditional lands of the Pima and Tohono O'odham. Together they are the GRAMMY-nominated and Nammy award-winning musical duo and recording artists known as RainSong.

PSALM 116; JOHN 13  
**MAUNDY THURSDAY**  
**MARI GRAHAM EVANS**

*He ali'i ka 'āina; he kauwa ke kanaka.  
Land is a chief; man its servant. – 'Ōlelo No'eau*

O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl. You have loosed my bonds.  
–Psalm 116: 16

My name is Mari Elia Kianikaimalino o Hanalei, and my ancestors were forged in the fires of the Pacific Ocean. I am Hawaiian or, Kanaka Maoli, a “Keiki o ka aina” (child of the land).

My identity as Kanaka is inseparable from my spiritual identity. Imprinted upon me before I was born, I was named “Kianikaimalino o Hanalei.” Following the Hawaiian tradition of imbuing a child’s name with their past, present, and future, my name roughly translates to “the calm and gentle waters of Hanalei.” My father says that the name evokes gracefully surfing across the peaceful waves at Hanalei Bay, where I was born and raised. With that, Hanalei Bay became a part of my DNA, just as it was a part of my name.

Love of land (or Aloha Aina) is ingrained in Hawaiian values and culture. My ancestors drew their strength (or mana) from the land and environment around them. When we say “land” or “aina,” we refer to all aspects of the environment, from the volcanic soil beneath our feet to the ocean and air around us and all the living creatures. Our relationship to the land is profoundly reciprocal; as a life-giver, our aina was to be revered and protected.

*What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?  
–Psalm 116:12*

Aloha Aina in action takes work. It involves shouldering challenges collectively and prioritizing doing what is right over what is easy. It requires sacrifice and vulnerability. Modern property ownership concepts would have been totally foreign to ancient Hawaiians. Land could not be bought or sold by mere men. The land was beyond men. How do you purchase or sell something that gave you life?

My birth marked a time in my parents’ life when both were largely disinterested in organized religion. I was never baptized, and my earliest memories of brick-and-mortar churches were terrifyingly funereal. Yet, belief and spirituality permeated my every waking moment. My ancestors were my teachers and were always right beneath my feet (sometimes literally). And while I will always have a somewhat tenuous relationship with Christianity because of the colonization of my people, it’s also no wonder why the lessons of Jesus were so resonant to Hawaiians of the 18th century.

*I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.  
—Psalm 116:17*

For a long time, the relatives who elected an open casket in their last wishes were my primary associations with the thing we call “church.” I had friends and other family members that regularly went to

church; I even went occasionally. Yet, I never questioned why we woke up at 5am for dawn patrol on Sunday instead of waking up for mass.

I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!  
—Psalm 116:18-19

Paddling out with my dad or brothers into the middle of Hanalei Bay was church. It was in the ocean, swimming, surfing, and thrashing in the waves, that I connected to the divine. The Pacific Ocean was my teacher, giving me warnings in the form of strong winds or shifts in currents or encouragement in the form of steady surf and high tides to catch me when I fell. The love I was infused with at birth for Hanalei Bay was just another manifestation of my spirituality.

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*  
—John 13:1

Conventionally unchurched, my first exposure to the tradition of Holy Week did not occur until I began serving the national offices of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A in March of 2016. Accordingly, one of my first tasks was to create compelling social media content for Holy Week. Equipped with the Book of Common Worship, the Presbyterian Mission Yearbook, and the wisdom of kind colleagues like Revs. Emily Odom and Charles Wiley, I began creating content. Little did I know God would push me out of my comfort zone and deeper into the waters of Holy Week.

In near-perfect synchronicity, my partner had started serving a local catholic church as their music director around the same time. Desperate to fill his choir for Holy Week Masses, I was convinced to join his five-person choir as the lead alto.

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. .*  
—John 13:3-5

On Maundy Thursday, after dazzling the congregation with my choral acumen, I tucked into my seat to listen to the Homily. Not expecting anything special, my mind went to dinner plans. As Father Lou spoke, he evoked some of his first memories of Pope Francis –how the Pope spent his day washing and kissing the feet of 12 prisoners. This profound demonstration of kindness, mercy, and love was jarring to me. That the top-ranked leader of the Catholic Church would spend his Holy Thursday in the care of others ran counter to my preconceived notions of what church leadership was. Yet again, God had something else in store.

As Fr. Lou continued to expand on the act of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, I became entranced. Feet are, let's face it, gross. Feet during the time of Jesus, especially the feet of humans traveling all over the Middle East in Jesus' service, were (probably) super gnarly. Caked with dirt, sand, and callouses from the miles of walking from city to city, Jesus got on his hands and knees and washed these seemingly gross feet. This is probably why the congregation began to squirm when Fr. Lou announced that we would be washing each other's feet. At Mass. That night.

Fr. Lou explained that this would likely be gross, smelly, and at the very least, uncomfortable. However,

that is precisely what genuine service to God and each other is.

*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. .  
—John 13:15*

Service to others, service to our aina involves vulnerability, accountability, and sometimes it involves getting a little muddy. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus provided a model and roadmap of how he expected us to treat others. I was entranced, inspired, and, unbeknownst to me, made new.

It was in this version of Christianity that I finally saw my ancestors and myself. This missing link between Aloha Aina and Jesus' message of service was finally found.

It is in this spirit that I continue to ground myself, both to my ancestors and my own developing theology. This Maundy Thursday, I encourage you to identify ways to be vulnerable, uncomfortable, and maybe a little grimy in service to others. Or, identify ways to demonstrate reciprocity with the aina around you.

*Ua Mau ke Ea o ka 'Āina i ka Pono*

*The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.*

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A Native Hawaiian from Kauai, Hawaii, Mari's passion for marketing and communications first ignited while slinging snorkel gear and Na Pali Coast sunset tours in high school and college. College brought Mari to Louisville, where she attended Bellarmine University. A stellar community of friends and family has kept her settled in the Bluegrass State.

With more than ten years in the digital marketing and advertising space, Mari continues to expand her expertise in digital media, social media and content strategy, as well as data analytics and web design. Over the years, Mari has lent her talents and skills to everything from financial institutions to governmental agencies and large religious organizations.

When she is not passionately advocating for strategic consistency across digital platforms, Mari moonlights as a mixed-media artist and pet parent to two cats, three dogs and hopefully chickens one day.



# GOOD FRIDAY

## JAY MERCADO

I will not ask you to sit in the tension of Good Friday or glimpse the despair of the early church as its spiritual leader was slain by empire. I will not ask that you resist the coming promise of Easter morning. If you are like me, you've been asked to do this every Good Friday since you became a believer.

The unbearable truth is that our world is flooded with examples of colored bodies fallen victim to state sanctioned violence; they are reduced to videos and headlines that circulate, names that we say aloud. Every day we are presented with opportunities to mourn the unjust. The reality is that we are so familiar with death that our response can become conditioned. We wade through the feeling that our social media posts, our police escort protests, our monetary gifts are just not enough.

I will not ask you to enter into the narrative of Good Friday. You are living it. This is instead an invitation to presence, to questioning, to be rightfully infuriated with the ways we distribute the weight of it all –

Reading the familiar account of The Crucifixion, so integral to my understanding of grace, I petition: why has my salvation been found exclusively in the stripes of Jesus Christ? His flesh torn symbolically as to open the veil encircling the throne of God, His body broken that I might expel the shame from mine. Is there not another entryway than through the wounds in His side?

I dwell on the inherent divinity of the colored body. The way this has always threatened the elite and powerful, a truth so profound that God turns His face from Jesus in those final moments. I see that, time and again, the unspeakable violence endured by the marginal lets off the residual pressure of injustice upon our most broken systems, deflating our collective belief in a better world. How perpetual cycles of violence eventually cause us to also look away, to find ourselves over-eager for Sunday morning. For relief, for an explanation, for hope.

I lament that my faith has seemed to be strengthened by my understanding as I ponder the death of the colored body: beginning with The Christ, but also beyond that: God communed with me in my kitchen as I wept for Philando Castile. I found space for my seeking in the wake of Breonna Taylor's murder. When did the perfecting of my faith begin to revolve around the tragedy of the colored body? Christ's sacrifice is profound, but its true message may be that suffering is senseless. I wonder now what God said in the garden when Jesus asked if there was another way. Maybe there was. Maybe such imperfect societies have never held space that de-necessitated the burdening of those on the margin.

The sufferings of Christ on Good Friday did not further sanctify Him, He maintains His Holiness in all manners of being – His death did not activate this within Him. How then have I internalized that this act ushers me into more intimate knowledge of God than another?

My deepest prayer this Good Friday is that the tenets of our faith broaden to include not merely the death but also the life of Christ as an agent of our sanctification. I recount the baptism of Christ before He began His public ministry – God declares His pleasure in us separate from our works. My service is not the cause of my salvation but instead a manifestation of a more robust understanding of it. I glimpse the dozing person of Jesus in the boat, amidst the storm. Why can't rest be my most sacred offering? I belong to the example of contentment in the Presence of God, a droplet in the current of Shalom.

I look today at the hands of the Living Word, not wounded, but cupped and full of water. Extending toward the sick and the weary. My peace is flowing from the realization that I am Holy as I seek to meet the needs of others in love.

We are confounded at times by the belief that Christ, having imparted Himself unto us, unlocks our capacity to do miracles. Perhaps we level these thoughts in the shadow of the cross instead of in the light of His gentleness. It may be that the most obvious example of death and rebirth, The account of The Crucifixion, blinds us from every small resurrection that occurs daily. Do we measure ourselves so much by His death, so irreplaceable, that we overlook life, those unannounced moments where we walk in Christ's very footsteps? We cannot be so swept by His grand gestures and miracles that we miss the still, small voice.

To view Jesus this way allows us to do the same for our siblings (by which I mean all people, kinship not reserved for those only with ideological similarities) to "give someone their flowers" is to recognize life as a vapor, to commend the beauty of another person while they are here with us. I long for our faith to be strengthened by acknowledging our need for community, for the decentering of ourselves to be a revelation.

Particularly as we relate to people different from us, let our faith grow from seeds of diversity, in conversation and communion, through the difficult conversations that arise therein. Let the ways that we honor others lead us into pursuits of biblical justice both big and small, that we would not wait for another school shooting or senseless act of police violence to employ our ability to do miraculous things. Love is a miraculous thing.

Then perhaps we will break this vicious cycle. It will change the way our beliefs are enriched to celebrate the lives of others. Let us be proactive with intercession and service. Moving earnestly in prayer only in response to the loss of Queer, BIPOC, unsheltered, immigrant, or differently abled relatives that costs these vulnerable people too much. The loss of their lives or their dignity should not be the only catalyst for spiritual breakthrough.

I'd like to offer a prayer in closing.

*To Earth, oh Lord, you came with intention,  
as a fulfillment of prophetic word.  
You appeared faithfully despite  
a most intimate knowledge of your fate.  
Surely, God chose a way that would satisfy  
not purely His wrath but also the wrath of men,  
a violence that continues to pervade our world.*

*In doing so, you have given us  
a chance at abundant life.  
As we reflect today on that Good Friday  
at the Place of the Skull,  
may we find our salvation  
may we find grace  
life and healing  
our resurrections  
beyond the spear in your side –*

as a dove descending upon you,  
the washing of feet,  
the quiet moments of solitude  
away on the mountain.

As we do,  
would you reveal Your Spirit  
within us,  
would you wipe away  
the belief in our depravity  
and leave only beauty.  
Would we witness beauty  
in ourselves the way that you do.  
Would we experience this revelation  
Exceedingly in others.  
Recognizing their divinity,  
doing justice unto them,  
seeking righteousness on their behalf  
and shielding them from the imposition  
of society's ills upon them.

Would life beget life,  
in our hearts today.  
For the renewing of our minds  
we worship the living God,  
looking ahead to the ascension  
of all things.  
By your loving-kindness,  
your gentle words,

in your example of rest, Jesus,  
we are healed.



IIWAA (Piipaash/Quechan) is a performer, songwriter, and recording artist representing District 7 of the Gila River Indian Community. They are the recipient of the 2022 Viola Award for Excellence in Music for their debut EP, *Dysphoria*. IIWAA has been featured on the Native America Calling radio show, the CBC, and recognized by the Grammys Recording Academy.

**COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; MATTHEW 28:1-10**

# **EASTER**

## **IRV PORTER**

### **Raised With Christ**

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN, INDEED! Today, nearly one-third, of 31.2% of the world's population, celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is now the most significant world event in all history – God's affirmation of his Son, Jesus Christ – a sign and seal of that affirmation – the evidence through which events in Jesus' life is based.

The Church tells this story in its publications. The amazing events of the first Easter:

- how, at first, his closest friends did not believe that he had been raised from the dead
- how they needed convincing,
- that the empty tomb was much more than a case of grave robbery
- and the reports of his being seen were much more than the wishful thinking of people in deep grief after the brutal death of one whom they loved.

In the end - they were all convinced. Convinced regardless of their unbelief in reports they heard. Convinced regardless of their knowledge that Jesus had died. Convinced despite the very human instinct to consider what is dead to be dead and gone. They were convinced despite the amazement, the skepticism and impossibility of the entire story.

In fact, they were so convinced - that they spent the rest of their lives telling others about Jesus and about how God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went about proclaiming forgiveness of sin and peace with God, doing good and healing all who were under the power of evil.

Telling about how he was at last killed - though he was innocent of any crime; how, in fact, according to our creed, “. . . was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty . . .”

That was the message we heard Peter proclaim to Cornelius' household and the message, and is still the message of the entire church since that first Easter. Christ is Risen! (He is Risen Indeed).

He grants life - here and now - and in the world to come - to all who believe in him. He forgives the sin of all who trust in his name. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that save a wretch like me. . .”

The word, life and teachings of Jesus are confirmed by his resurrection, a resurrection that God gave to him because of his faithful obedience and his love. The cup did not pass – it was God's will and it was done.

The teaching of Jesus made true by his resurrection is that we shall also be raised:

- raised from sin to righteousness, life with God here upon the earth
- raised from a life of anxiety and fear to one of trust and hope in which we share his light to everyone

- raised from a life of suspicion and distrust to a life of belief and faith in which we proclaim peace and help make peace by the power of God's Spirit but raised from death
- raised from death, raised from the grave, from dust and ashes

Christ is Risen.

There are two qualities to the Resurrection life to which we are raised with Christ: life here before our death and life afterwards, life beyond death.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he speaks of both. For Paul, the resurrection from death to eternal life begins now as we have died with Christ in the waters of our baptism; as we die with him to all those things that separate us from God and from another; accepting his message, believing in his name, taking up our cross, and following him.

Paul urges us to set our minds on things above, things spiritual, things of God rather than earthly things, material things, being popular or getting attention. To set our minds on what God has done and is even now doing to bring his kingdom, his way, a reality among us rather than upon those things that will fade and disappear like the grass of the fields and the flowers on these plants.

Those who have died with Christ, baptized, and living the Christian life in their hearts, are raised with Him. This is our faith.

Faith that our ancestors embraced for those of us who came after them and we pass on to the next generations. A faith that those descendants must then embrace, each one, for themselves.

Our citizenship is not of this world. With Christ, we also have been given the responsibility to care for this planet we live on and been told to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God.

Our citizenship is in the heavenly places - where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, it is eternal where God embraces us, and we embrace God.

The citizenship of God's Kingdom begins now - in this world - when we believe in our hearts that Christ is Risen from the Dead - and when we name him with our lips our Lord and our God.

Today, Easter, is the opposite of death.

Today, Easter, is a day to remember an amazing thing about the tomb.

The tomb of Jesus is not the end.

It is NOT the end of the path,

NOT the end of freedom,

NOT the end of light.

The tomb of Jesus is not a rock barrier. It is a tunnel. Tunnels have some scary qualities. They feel claustrophobic and dark. But it goes somewhere. When you go through a tunnel, you are traveling.

Jesus provides saving companionship to those who thought their way had ended, to those who thought the rocky walls of today's tombs mean the end. He is telling us that there is a way out.

The tomb is not the end! The tomb is a tunnel! There is always a way out, a way through the darkness.

When God leads any of us out of life's tunnels, most of the time, we do not expect, we cannot expect,



where we will be when we get out.

Even if we have been praying hard to escape the tunnels of our lives, praying hard to escape the tomb, we have no idea what this new life of resurrection will look like. Often, when we come out of the tunnels of our lives, we don't recognize the holy land that we are standing on. We emerge onto holy ground, but don't know it.

This is what we mean when we call the resurrection something new! It was not the old life that Jesus was resurrected to; it was an entirely new life. It is not the old life we are resurrected to. It is an entirely new life! We mistakenly want resurrection to the old life. We think resurrection magically restores all of the old, great times and places of our memories. If we do, we fail.

If we are looking for the old to be restored in our lives, we will be disappointed. We will miss the true resurrection.

That is why Mary Magdalene, does not recognize Jesus at first. She was expecting a resurrection of the original, restored Jesus. He was resurrected. The land around him was new. And Jesus made the people around him new too.

Today, when we walk out into the world celebrating resurrection, God wants to raise us to something new; God wants us to live into something new. Can we do that? Our tunnels do not lead back to the way we came in.

The tunnels of our lives will always, always, lead us to another place entirely, a new place, a place that we might not recognize at first. The tomb is a tunnel! Death is a tunnel! To walk and journey with Jesus means that we do not, we cannot, avoid death. We don't walk around death, or over death. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are there."

The way of Jesus is down and through death, through that tunnel first, and only then out the other side. On that other side is a place we might not recognize at first; but that's okay. God shows us healing light, open space, bright glory. We call that other side -- the other side of the tunnel -- we call it Easter!

"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it", all of us who have walked with Jesus through the tunnels of life. Happy Easter!



Rev. Irvin Porter is descended from three Native American tribes: Pima, T'hono O'odham, and Nez Perce. He is the seventh of eight children raised by a single father after the divorce of his parents. Irvin is descended from Twisted Hair, the Nez Perce chief who met Lewis and Clark in 1805. Twisted Hair's son, Chief Lawyer, was the first Elder elected by the Nez Perce in 1871 when First Indian Presbyterian Church of Kamiah, Idaho was dedicated. Lawyer's son, Archie, was the 2nd Presbyterian minister ordained among the Nez Perce people. Irvin's ancestors among both the Nez Perce and Pima tribes were some of the first Christian converts among their people and many served the Presbyterian Church as elders or ministers including his father, Lawrence Porter, Pima and T'hono O'odham, who was also ordained as a Presbyterian minister.

Irvin was ordained by Olympia Presbytery in 2003 but began as a Commissioned Lay Leader at Church of the Indian Fellowship in Tacoma, Washington in 2001. The church was founded in 1876, and Irvin is the first Native American pastor.

He became the Associate for Native American Intercultural Congregational Support for the Racial Equity and Women's Intercultural Ministries of the Presbyterian Church, USA, in June of 2013. His responsibilities include working as liaison between the ninety-five Native American congregations within the PC(USA).

He enjoys music, playing the piano, Native American arts, crafts, books, as well as being a history and genealogy enthusiast. He and his wife Anne-Cecile live in Puyallup, Washington's South Hill community.

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