

Reflection for National Indigenous Day of Prayer

June 18, 2023

Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 19; 2 Corinthians 5:6-21; John 1:1-18
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The Seven Grandfather Teachings: Love, Respect, Truth, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom



We are all familiar with Hymn #3 in our Book of Common Praise, "Morning Has Broken." It was first published in 1931 and the lyrics were written by an English author named Eleanor Farjeon who was inspired by the setting of a village in East Sussex. She set it to a traditional Scottish Gaelic tune, and in 1971, English folk singer, Cat Stevens, included "Morning Has Broken" on his album, "Teaser and the Firecat," becoming one of the top hits that year. I taught the song to my primary and junior music classes throughout my thirty-five years of teaching, but I never really focussed on the words and their deep spirituality until I sang it here in worship.

Morning has broken like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!
Praise for them, springing fresh from the Word!

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dew fall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning
Born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's recreation of the new day!

"God's recreation of the new day." Imagine living in harmony with Mother Earth, the animals around, and with each other, before strangers came to Turtle Island, the land Indigenous Peoples called North America. They had a belief system that enabled them to live a good life, until European colonization upended and devastated their culture and lives.

During his visit to Canada in May of last year, the Archbishop of Canterbury apologized for the Church of England's part in the "structural sins of racism and discrimination" committed against the Indigenous peoples of Canada. (May 06 2022 Canada visit by Archbishop of Canterbury, Church Times (churchtimes.co.uk) article by Hattie Williams)

Archbishop Welby expressed his commitment to listening, learning, and taking action towards reconciliation, starting by addressing the rights of Indigenous peoples around the world.

He stated, "I am sorry that the Church was not there for you when we should have been your greatest friends. . . I am sorry that the Church belittled your spirituality, denigrated, and undermined your culture, traditions, and, above, all your languages, and abused your rights.

And I am sorry that, in an eagerness to share the good news of Jesus Christ, we committed an indefensible sin of the arrogant assumption that we ‘brought God to you’ rather than understanding and seeking to listen.”

This morning, it is my intention to help us deepen our understanding as I share a set of Indigenous beliefs and teachings showing a rich history of spirituality and connection to the Creator, as well as to the lands that they have called home for thousands of years. It is my honour and privilege to share these teachings with you and note their similarities to those in our Christian lives. It has also been humbling, that I have become much more appreciative of Indigenous culture; that, only through secrecy and determination, their culture survived; that the Christian Eurocentric colonizers failed to live up to these shared beliefs and, to this day, the struggles and challenges of the original inhabitants of Turtle Island continue.



The Seven Grandfathers, carving by Garrett Nahdee, 2021, Legislative Assembly of Ontario

The Seven Grandfather Teachings, also called The Seven Sacred Teachings, are based on the Anishinaabe tradition, but are valued and practised by many Indigenous people. Reflected in Scripture, they are a guide to living in right relationships —with Creator, with each other, with the land, and with ourselves.

(The following primary sources: The Seven Grandfather Teachings, Legislative Assembly of Ontario, ola.org; 2020 Indigenous Day of Prayer, United Church of Canada)

The story is told that Creator gave the Seven Grandfathers the responsibility to watch over the people. Life was hard and so the Grandfathers looked for a helper, someone who could be taught how to live in a good way with all of creation. Finally, they found a baby boy, pure enough to receive the teachings and bring these teachings to the people. Each Grandfather gave the young boy a gift ~ a teaching to share with all the people. These teachings, which we also share in our Judeo-Christian worship, are: Love, Respect, Truth, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom and are represented by specific birds and animals.

LOVE

To know love is to know the Creator, the parent of all children, and must be unconditional. The Eagle represents love because only the Eagle has the ability and strength to fly higher than any other animal, therefore placing it closest to the Creator. It can travel over great distances carrying all of the teachings to the four directions of the Earth, the prayer which we read aloud together earlier.

Colossians 3:14 states: *Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (NRSV)*

RESPECT

Respect is mutual and reciprocal – in order to receive Respect you must give Respect. All of Creation should be treated with Respect.

Respect is represented by the bison, which was, at one time, a significant resource for Anishinaabe people, giving every part of itself to sustain human life for food, clothing and shelter.

Matthew 7:12 describes The Golden Rule: *In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. (NRSV)*

TRUTH

Truth is speaking only about what you have lived or experienced, and to live by what is right. Truth is represented by the turtle, who was here during the creation of Earth and carries all of life's teachings on his back. By living in a slow and conscientious manner, the turtle knows the value of both the journey and the destination.

Ephesians 6:14 says: *Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness (NRSV)*

COURAGE

Courage is to face your foes with integrity, and do what is right even when the consequences are unpleasant. Courage is represented by the bear. The mother bear has the courage and strength to face her fears and challenges while protecting her young.

2 Timothy 1:7 speaks of the spirit: *for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and discipline. (NRSV)*

HONESTY

Honesty is speaking and acting truthfully, first with yourself and then you will easily be able to be honest with others. Honesty is represented by the raven which accepts himself for who he is and does not look to try to be like others.

Ephesians 4:25 says what the Indigenous peoples' ancestors passed down long before they were introduced to Christianity: *So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. (NRSV)*

HUMILITY

Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation. You are equal to others, but you are not better. Humility is represented by the wolf, a social animal. Living in packs, wolves work in co-operation with each other for the greater good of the family unit. The wolf teaches us humility; once it has caught its prey, the wolf will not take any of the food until it can be shared with the pack.

Philippians 2:3-4 states: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. (NRSV)*

The mixture of these teachings, combined with the experiences of life, is what The Grandfathers refer to as Wisdom.

WISDOM

Wisdom is to be used for the good of all people - to cherish knowledge is to know Wisdom. Wisdom is represented by the beaver, who uses its natural gifts of sharp teeth wisely to cut logs and branches to build dams and lodges. The same can be said for human beings. Our spirit will grow weak if it is not fulfilling its use. When used properly, our gifts contribute to the development of a peaceful and healthy being and community.

James 3:13 says: *Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. (NRSV)*

Before the Seven Grandfathers left the child, they told him, "Each of these teachings must be used with the rest. You cannot have Wisdom without Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, and Truth. You cannot be Honest if you are only using one of the other teachings.

To omit one teaching would be embracing the opposite of what the teaching means." It was then up to the child to forget them, or to put them to use.

The Seven Sacred Teachings were intended to help people live a good life, a righteous and holy life. Our Biblical scriptures do, as well. When we follow these teachings, they help us live in peace and harmony with everyone.

Each one of us represents the child. "Perhaps it is our task," says Rev. Deb Anderson Pratt of the United Church of Canada, "to look at the teachings from our scriptures again with new eyes, eyes that will then enable us to finally see the Indigenous peoples who live alongside us in a new light, a light that finally lives up to the values reflected in BOTH the teachings of the Seven Grandfathers AND the ones that we seek to live up to as pillars of our faith. It is only when we do this that the healing of what is broken between ourselves and the Indigenous peoples of this country and the world may finally begin to happen. We've got to start somewhere, why not start with the teachings that we hold sacred, and let them bring us together with those we have mistreated, in a new spirit of understanding, compassion, and respect. May it be so." *(2020 Indigenous Day of Prayer: The Seven Grandfather Teachings, United Church of Canada)*

Amen.



**National Indigenous Day of Prayer
Montessori Preschool 2022**

GLOSSARY OF NAMES IN SELECTED QUOTES (from First Nations New Testament)

Love

Creator Sets Free (Jesus)

Small Man (Paul)

Village of Giants (Colossae)

Respect

Drawn from the Water (Moses)

Truth

Small Man (Paul)

Village of Desire (Ephesus)

Courage

Small Man (Paul)

He Gives Honor (Timothy)

Honesty

Small Man (Paul)

Village of Desire (Ephesus)

Humility

Small Man Paul

Village of Horses (Philippi)

Wisdom

He Leads the Way (James)

Biblical quotes in First Nations New Testament

Love: "Small Man to the Sacred Family in Village of Giants" COLOSSIANS 3:14

14 When all this new regalia is in place, let the love of the Great Spirit gather all the loose threads and braid them together in unity with one another.

Respect: "Gift from Creator Tells the Good Story" MATTHEW 7:12

12 "Here is the meaning of what I have been saying: whatever good you want others to do for you is what you should do for them. This is the whole purpose of the instructions given by Drawn from the Water (Moses) and the words spoken by the prophets.

Truth: "Small Man to the Sacred Family in Village of Desire" EPHESIANS 6:14

14 Wrap the sash of truth around your waist. Cover your heart with the breastplate of making wrongs right again.

Courage: "Second Letter from Small Man to He Gives Honor" 2 TIMOTHY 1:7

7 Creator has not given us a timid spirit but one of power, love, and clear thinking.

Honesty: "Small Man to the Sacred Family in Village of Desire" EPHESIANS 4:25

25 We are all members of one body—one tribe—so we must speak truth and be honest with each other, leaving the path of falsehood far behind.

Humility: "Small Man to the Sacred Family in Village of Horses" PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

3 But when you do these things, make sure you do them for the right reasons. Do not let selfish ways take you down a path of bragging or trying to look better than others. Instead, let humility be your guide as you honor others above yourself.

4 Each of you should look to the needs of others, not just to your own.

Wisdom: "He Leads the Way to the Scattered Tribes" JAMES 3:13

13 Are any among you wise and understanding? Then show it in the way you live, doing good from a humble and wise heart.

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