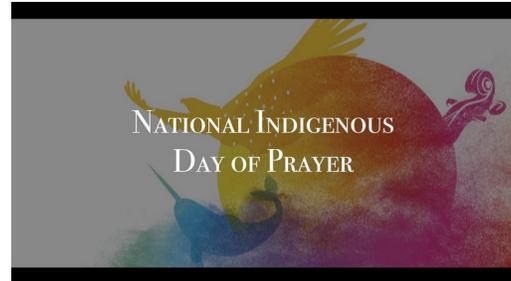


Isaiah 40:25-31, Psalm 19, 2 Corinthians 5:6-21, John 1:1-18

We acknowledge that we are in the traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishinaabe, adjacent to the territory of the Haudenosaunee, Chippewa, and Cree, on whose land and by whose waters we gather by the Williams Treaty to worship, listen, learn, share, and heal together in the name of our Creator, the Holy One of Blessing. This territory is also under Treaty 20.

June is National Indigenous Awareness Month. June signals the end of spring and the beginning of summer. June is called Ode'imini Giizis in the Anishinaabe language, meaning 'Strawberry Moon.'

This morning we are celebrating the National Indigenous Day of Prayer, the Sunday before National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21st.



On this day, and every day, all Canadians are asked to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and to explore the entirety of the history and experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. (*Government of Canada: About National Indigenous Peoples Day*)

The Canadian Constitution recognizes these three groups as Aboriginal peoples, also known as Indigenous Peoples. Although these groups share many similarities, they each have their own distinct heritage, language, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs.

Spiritual beliefs. This past week, especially Tuesday night, did any of you look up into the southeastern sky? If you did, you saw the rising of the second supermoon of 2022, the year's biggest and brightest, and clinging low to the horizon.

For many Indigenous peoples, the sixth moon of Creation is the Strawberry Moon ~ Ode'imini Giizis. The strawberry is the first berry to ripen before all other berries, and ready to harvest for medicine food. It is known as the 'heart berry' because of its shape, and its medicinal uses are for strengthening and healing a heart system. A strawberry plant does resemble a heart system with its veins, leaves, and roots.



Strawberry Moon is in the time of Summer Solstice when people come together to hold a yearly ceremony and feast, welcoming everyone home, regardless of their differences over the past year, letting go of judgement and self-righteousness.

But did you know that celebrations of Indigenous ceremonies and feasts were illegal under the Indian Act of Canada, that they were culturally banned until 1951? Fortunately, though, traditions were passed on by those who took risks to preserve vital cultural knowledge for future generations. Many communities are still relearning and rediscovering their traditions. (*Our Stories: First Peoples in Canada, Centennial College, Toronto, 2014*)

How does my introduction connect to our scripture passages? Our readings today were selected by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada as resources to be shaped, adapted and used in local communities. (*The Anglican Church of Canada: Faith, Worship, and Ministry*)

They were chosen as a bridge between cultures, to combine the common and, for the Indigenous peoples, help create and develop their own Anglican way, that of the self-determined Indigenous Anglican Church of Canada, Sacred Circle:

“Elders began to yearn for a truly Indigenous expression of Christian faith: The Living Word of God, revealed through the reality of Indigenous families and communities. The elders imagined that they could see the life of God, as we know it in Jesus, revealed in their communities, cultures and spiritual traditions.” (*Our Story of Self Determination, anglican.ca, 2020*)

Truth and Reconciliation. Reparation. Pain and Hope.

It has taken a long time for Canadians and our government to recognize and subsequently take action to address the egregious wrongs suffered by our First Nations peoples, from our systematic oppression of indigenous sovereignty, language, culture and spirituality; our role in the Residential Schools designed to eliminate the unique society, wisdom and beauty of the indigenous peoples of this land (*A Litany for the Healing and Restoration of our Church, from the Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land, 2017*), especially so, in the wake of the horrific discoveries of unmarked graves of children at residential school sites across Canada.

Let us pray that the nation and the church will never again forget the many other ways in which Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be harmed by Canada's colonial legacy.

“If there is hope for Canadians in our relationship with First Nations people...it is in the work of truth and reconciliation.” (*Sermon Notes, National Indigenous Day of Prayer, The Rev. Scott Gould, St. Helen's Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of New Westminster, June 21, 2020*)

Let's look at our scripture passages. How do they identify with holding our indigenous brothers and sisters in prayer today?

The Rev. Rod Sprange of Winnipeg, Manitoba, explored the reasoning and I would like to share part of his perspective. (*The following is quoted/adapted from a sermon written by The Rev. Rod Sprange of St. Peter's Anglican Church, Winnipeg, MB, June 17, 2018 with written permission to use from Rev. Sprange*)

[He looked] closely into each reading and [searched] for the truths in there through the lens of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Canada. [He] also wanted to understand what Good News the Gospel reading had for this relationship and the well-being of Indigenous people.

Our reading from Isaiah reminds us that God supports the powerless and downtrodden, that God is a God of justice. Isaiah reminds us that our creator God is discernible in the beauty and awe of creation, something our Indigenous brothers and sisters knew long before we came to the shores of this continent. Together we need to honour and care for God's creation.

The Psalm reiterates the wonder of creation, especially the night sky, that through creation God's words are heard to the ends of the earth.

Psalm 19 also reminds us that the law [is] perfect and trustworthy...The commandment “*You shall not bear false witness*” means standing up for another unjustly accused. We are not to stand silent when someone else is being denigrated. We are to speak up in their defence ~ to cry out for justice. We need to think about what this means when we hear someone making racist comments about indigenous people or stereotyping them.

Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi encourages us to trust God, keep the faith and walk in His ways with truth, honour, justice, and purity. If we do that together, indigenous and non-indigenous, we will find the path to the peace of God.

And now we come to the Gospel of John. These eighteen verses tell the whole Gospel story ~ from creation to the revelation of God in Christ. John wrote of Christ, “*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the all people.*” As Jesus said, “*Whoever does what is true comes to the light.*” We come to the light when we do the work Jesus commanded us to do ~ ‘love one another’ and when we face the ugly truth of our shared history with our indigenous peoples.

Our readings are full of descriptions about the revelation of God in creation, something the indigenous people knew long before the settlers and missionaries came to impose their version of Christianity with devastating and long lasting consequences even to the present.

With truth, reconciliation and reparations, we Canadians have an enormous responsibility to actively address and correct the bitter and demoralizing legacies of Colonialism, with residential school survivors coming forward and sharing their personal stories, the links between income, social factors, and health, inadequate housing and crowded living conditions, lower levels of education, higher rates of incarceration, higher rates of unemployment, and most tragic of all, the higher rate of suicide among First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth.

We are to be active disciples of God’s love, and referencing John, verse 5: “*The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*”

What a confident note of hope this verse conveys! On the one hand, it is the declaration of a state of fact: light is stronger than darkness.

At the same time, it is also a promise: even when it seems otherwise ~ the light continues to shine and the darkness has neither overcome nor understood it. *(A Homily Preached by the Bishop of Niagara on Christmas 2020)* We are to live and work to make that truth known and tangible and real.

And as the summer solstice approaches, let us celebrate our Indigenous peoples’ strength, resilience and hope and join their Ode’imini Giizis, celebrating their rich culture, language and traditions.

Bishop Riscylla Shaw notes that “*the Church’s role [is to be] bearers of Christ’s light, even when faced with overwhelming grief and despair...The Church is the people...We are Anglican together...The Church has life, and the life-giving message of Jesus carries on.*” *(Resilience and hope in perilous times, The Anglican, June 2022)*

I would like to close my reflection with a prose-poem written for the Anishinaabe people by a Euro-American minister:

Ode'imín Giizis (prose by Maren C. Tirabassi, *Gifts in Open Hands*, wordpress.com, adapted)

It is June, heart-berry moon, not that I have any right to the old story of the healing ways of Ode'imín, the wisdoms of Nookomis, except to learn, to be one who sits in the circle, not at its centre, but to hear the storyteller.

European [Canadian] born, I listen to new strawberry wisdom –

We who have been takers can no longer reach out and grab whatever we want, but, bending very low, find and pick what heals us all.

And things most precious will be brief.

They come silently and, no matter how busy we are, and we are a busy people, they must be tasted now, in the season they are ripe.

And this, too, perhaps, we learn — to call summer by our neighbours' names – not July and August, but miskomini-giizis, red-raspberry moon and miin(ikaa)-giizis, blueberry moon, for days are best lived, not under the names of conquerors, but by fruit of the spirit.

Amen.

Sacred Circle

The logo for the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples was designed by The Rev. Mervin Wolfleg of the Siksika Nation in southern Alberta, inspired by words and images of The Rev. Arthur Anderson, a Plains Cree from Punnichy, Saskatchewan. Mervin explains its many symbolisms.



The **fish** at the centre of the logo is formed by the overlap of two circles—or two traditions—coming together, the Aboriginal tradition and the European tradition.

The point where they come together is where Christ is to be found, represented by both the **cross** and the fish (which also contains the form of the Greek letters, Alpha and Omega).

The cross is surrounded by the **four colours** of the four peoples of the world. Our vision is of all races coming together.

The fish and the cross also contain within them the initials of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples.

The **eagle** has always been a strong image for Aboriginal peoples. The eagle feather attached to the cross comes from Isaiah 40:31 — “But those who wait for the Lord shall renew

their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.” If people can come together, they will fly.

The **green** in the logo represents our Mother Earth, and the **blue** the waters of the oceans that surround the continents.

Blue is also the colour of hope for Aboriginal people. When we are watching for good weather to come, we look for the first signs of blue in the sky.

Green is also the symbol of new growth.

Red is the colour of the Aboriginal peoples.

Source: 2022 The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, About Our Logo

www.anglican.ca

Further Reading:

Anglican Journal, June 2022 edition (online/paper copies available outside Jenkins Hall):

~ Indigenous Ministries: God Brings Hope; Anglican Voices page 6: Indigenous Anglicans are building a church in our own image

The Anglican, June 2022 edition (online/paper copies available outside Jenkins Hall):

~ Bishop’s Opinion page 4: Resilience and hope in perilous times by Bishop Riscylla Shaw;

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/celebrate-canada/indigenous-peoples-day.html>

<https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/8-key-issues-for-indigenous-peoples-in-canada>

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/principles.pdf>