**Reflection for National Indigenous Day of Prayer**
**2025**

"There is a longing among all people and creatures to have a sense of purpose and worth.
To satisfy that common longing in all of us we must respect each other."

These are the words of Chief Dan George who was a celebrated Canadian Indigenous actor, poet, author, activist, and visionary leader. He left an indelible mark on the world through his poignant words and thoughts. His insights resonate with themes of love, nature, and the human experience, reflecting a deep wisdom that transcends time.

We seek to walk in a good way with our Indigenous neighbours, and one thing we can do as faith communities is learn about their spiritual practices and honour them.
Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action # 60 asks us to do this work, individually and together.

Chief George also noted, "Can we talk of integration until there is integration of hearts and minds? Unless you have this, you only have a physical presence, and the walls between us are as high as the mountain range."

This morning, it is my intention to help us lower the walls 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 an honour and privilege to share these teachings with you and note their similarities to those in our Christian Beatitudes.

It has also been humbling, that I have become much more appreciative of Indigenous culture; that, only through secrecy and determination, that theirs 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 - which we call North America.

The teachings of all Indigenous cultures incorporated the ethics, values, structures, ceremonial practices, and spiritual beliefs of the group.
These teachings also ensured the survival of the people.
The way in which they are told will differ depending on which First Nation tribe is sharing them.

The S**even Grandfather Teachings** are among the most widely shared Anishinaabe principles. They offer ways to enrich one's life while existing in peace and harmony with all of creation, abiding by a profound respect for all living things. Each teaching is linked to an animal that represents it. (Aboriginal Spirituality and Christianity, wordpress.com)

The **Seven Grandfather Teachings** are often compared to our Christian **Beatitudes.** They offer different but complementary pathways to understanding and living a meaningful life.
The **Beatitudes** emphasize qualities like meekness, mercy, and peace, promising blessing in heaven.
The **Seven Grandfather Teachings** include Love, Respect, Truth, Courage, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom.

The story is told of the Creator giving spirits known as the Seven Grandfathers the responsibility to watch over the Anishinaabe people.
The Grandfathers sent a Messenger down to earth to find someone to communicate Anishinaabe values, and after searching in all four directions, the Messenger found a baby.
The Seven Grandfathers then instructed the Messenger to take the baby around the Earth for seven years to learn the Anishinaabe way of life.

After their return, the Grandfathers gave the baby, now a young boy, seven teachings to share with the Anishinaabe people: love, respect, courage or bravery, truth, honesty, humility, and wisdom. Each is represented by an animal or bird. (Seven Grandfather Teachings, Seven Generations Teaching Institute, February 3, 2021, 7generations.org)

**LOVE**
To know love is to know peace. If you love yourself, you would be living at peace with the Creator and his creation
The gift of love is represented by the eagle ~ the one that can fly the highest, and is therefore the nearest to the Creator.
It can see the farthest and is the animal that carries the people's prayers to the spirits.
Everyone needs love, and we must support one another.
This teaching mirrors the second Beatitude, **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**
The concept of comforting one another in the bible is similar to the concepts of unconditional love in many First Nations cultures.

**RESPECT**
To honour all creation and the Creator is to have respect, and is represented by the buffalo.
The buffalo gives every part of his being to sustain the human way of living, not because he is of less value, but because he respects the balance and needs of others.
Do not waste and be mindful of the balance of all living things.
Share and give away what you do not need. This teaching is closely related to the fifth Beatitude, **Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.**
The idea is that you should treat all creation with respect and must give respect to receive it.
Some would say this is closely related to the teaching of mercy and kindness.

**TRUTH**
Truth to the First Nations peoples is to not deceive yourself or others. Truth is represented by the turtle as he was here during the creation of Earth and carries the teachings of life on his back.
The turtle lives life in a slow and meticulous manner because he understands the importance of both the journey and the destination.

Truth is to know all of these things, and apply faith and trust in your teachings, tying into the central ideas of righteousness and being true to oneself.
This is reflected with **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**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, though gentle by nature, will become aggressive when it comes to the safety and well-being of her cubs.
The bear also shows us how to live a balanced life with rest, survival and play.
This teaching speaks for the importance of integrity, even in the face of hardship, and the Beatitude it shares is **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

**HONESTY**
To walk through life with honour is to know honesty.
Honesty is represented by the raven which accepts himself for who he is and does not look to try to be like others.
He uses what he has been given to survive and thrive.
In the sixth Beatitude, **Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God**, it is said that a person has to be clear of all selfish intention to be honest.
If this honesty and selflessness is achieved, then the pure of heart will see God.

**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 which is strong and powerful alone, but finds its greatest strength when part of a pack, working in co-operation with each other for the greater good of the family unit.
Live life selflessly and not selfishly.
Find balance within yourself and all living things.
This teaching and the first Beatitude, **Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven,** stress the importance of being humble, that each person is a part of creation and that their gifts were given to them.
The mixture of these teachings, combined with the experiences of life, is what The Grandfathers refer to as **Wisdom**.

**WISDOM**
To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.
Know the difference between right and wrong, and apply it to your daily life.
The beaver represents wisdom because he uses his natural gift wisely for his survival.

The beaver also alters his environment in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way for the benefit of his family.
Wisdom is to be used for the good of all people.
This teaching strongly reflects the third Beatitude, **Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth**. (sources of comparison include but are not limited to: "Grandfather Teachings vs The Beatitudes", by jadedsentimental, Decemberr 12, 2014, worldreligions35, wordpress.com; "Seven Grandfather Teachings vs the Eight Beatitudes" by Keri Malanchuk, April 8, 2016, prezi.com)

The Seven Grandfathers, before they left the young boy, told him: "Each of these teachings must be used with the rest. You cannot have Wisdom without Love, Respect, Courage, 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 and share them with the Peoples of Turtle Island.

The Seven Grandfather Teachings and the Beatitudes offer a framework for living a meaningful and purposeful life.

The seventh Beatitude, **Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God,** signifies that individuals who actively strive to bring peace and reconcile differences will be recognized as God's children.
We are all God's children.
Chief Dan George said, "The heart never knows the colour of the skin."

In closing, I would like to quote Rev. Deb Anderson Pratt of the United Church of Canada.

"Perhaps it is our task...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. Aho.

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