

Sacred Circle - 7 August 2018
The Spirituality of Self Determination
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Mitákuyepi, Ĥtayétu kiŋ le, Čhaŋté wašteya napečiyúzapelo. Šičaŋđu Lakhóta miyéyelo. Waŋblí Wakíta emáčiyapelo. Na Haída Emačiyapi “Skíl Gyants,” na Kaŋgi Thánka Tipi miyéyelo.

Relatives and kinsfolk, with a good heart I shake your hand. I was born to the Šičaŋđu Lakhóta but I have been adopted by the Raven House of the Haida people. As we continue to restore our original Indigenous ways we recover some of our traditional protocols: always beginning with our own God-given languages and observances such as acknowledging the territories we gather on. So I want to raise my hands in gratitude to the Lheidli T’enneh and to their ancestors for maintaining their responsibility of living well in this two river place as God had intended them to live.

Beginning the Journey

My task for this evening is to explore the spirituality of self-determination, spiritual and religious self-determination in our case. As we move deeper into being an Indigenous Anglican Church we will continue to be more self-determined. We are leaving an old way of being Anglican and setting out on a journey to a new way, a self-determined way of being Anglican. In a way, we are at the same place where the Jewish elder Abraham was. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, “By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did [his son]

and [his grandson], who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (11:8-10). So what are we to think as we continue on our journey to our city, our self-determined church, founded and built by God?

In Indigenous traditions, we always begin with the wisdom of our ancestors. The traditional ways of our ancestors are our Old Testament. What we call the Old Testament in the Bible is the written record of God’s actions and teachings for the Jewish people. In those same centuries, God was not silent in North America. God also spoke here on Turtle Island, on North America, to our ancestors. Their oral teachings and traditional ceremonies are not pagan, nor old fashioned, nor demonic. They are the actions and teachings from God for our ancestors and so we treat them with the same dignity and respect we would have for anything from God. God gave songs, prayers, ceremonies, and stories to our ancestors and to us and we always turn to them first, especially if we are going to be able to hear clearly the teachings of Jesus. We listen to the wisdom of our ancestors since God gives them to us, their descendants. This wisdom teaching for tonight comes from my Lakota ancestors who live out on the prairies. It comes from a time before we came to live on this earth.

Eháaanni Ohúnkaka... A loong time ago-- we lived in another world below this one. There we had everything we needed for a good life. We didn’t need anything from anyone else nor anything from anywhere else and the people were content.

There was one man, Tǎokáhe, First man. He was a strong, healthy, and intelligent man. However he had a problem, a flaw. He was curious. He wanted to know everything. He wanted to see everything and understand even more. One day he was out, away from all the others and he saw something coming from above. He had never seen this thing before and so he climbed very high to get near to this new thing that we would call light.

The light came from a hole from the world above and it came through a cave. As Tǎokáhe got near the cave entrance Iktómi spotted him. Iktómi is the trickster, who isn't evil or a devil, but does make anyone find his or her bad traits and flaws. As I said, Tǎokáhe's flaw was his curiosity. Iktómi saw this quality and when he saw First Man looking out from the cave entrance, Iktómi quickly went to get the help of Anóǵ Ité, Double Woman, the spirit of creativity. She can make anything beautiful. She is called Double Woman because one side of her is beautiful beyond words and the other half of her is repulsive and uglier than you can imagine. The trickster Iktómi asked Double Woman to make this world as beautiful as it can be. Anóǵ Ité used her skills to make beautiful quill-decorated tipis to stand around the cave. She quickly completed stunning and attractive men's and women's clothing and lay them on the ground. She immediately had large bowls of the best soup, roasted meats and berry desserts sitting ready to be eaten. I don't know if there was any bannock though. First Man saw the sturdy and noble tipis, the attractive clothes, the large feast bowls of food, and he thought this world was a pretty good place to live. He probably said to himself, "It is so beautiful it must be Prince George out there." He hurried back down the cave to tell the other Lakǎóta what he had seen.

Tǎokáhe, First Man, was a good speaker. He could get people to listen to him and he could convince them what they should be doing. He gathered the Lakhóta together and told them what he had seen and how this new world would be a much better place to live. Everyone agreed with him and they began to gather their few possessions for the move. However there was a wise elder who was in charge of this lower world. It was because of her directions that everything went well. She was so skilled that almost no one knew she was the real leader. She cautioned the people. She said, "You can go there if you wish but you will learn two things. One, you will learn that not everything is what it first seems to be. Secondly, You will learn that you can never come back here to this old world again." After thinking about her cautions, the people said they would still rather come up to this world that had light and that we now live in. So we came. All of us came out of that Wind Cave in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

When Tǎokáhe led the people out of the cave he was startled to see that the tipis had begun to weather and the colours of the quillwork decoration were fading. The clothes that had been lying on the ground now had insect holes in some of them and they were already worn and looking old. The food in the feast bowls was cold and had begun to spoil. He was as alarmed as some of the people and they decided they should return to the lower world while they still remembered the way through the cave. They tried but could not find the way back. They organized scouting teams and the younger men went into the cave over and over for days but they could not find the road back. Finally they said, We will just have to stay here and make the best of it and so they did. However autumn came and they did not know what that meant nor did they know what they should be doing about it. Eventually

winter came and the people were freezing and they had no food. They did not know how to live in this new world of light. They were crying and praying for help but they did not know if any one was listening.

In the lower world, the wise elder heard the people crying. She listened to their pitiful prayers and she had compassion for us. She went to the creator of the visible world and said she was going to come to help us. The creator of this world listened to her willingness and thanked her for her good heart. The creator said that she was doing a good thing to help those pitiful people now in the world of light. She was willing to sacrifice herself and her life to rescue us Lakhóta. The creator said,

“Since you are going to help them I will always give you the right to speak to me directly and I will always listen. You alone, of all the beings in the worlds I will listen to. You will not have to make big ceremonies or do anything special. I will hear you. There is one more thing. Since you are going into this upper world of light, your form will change if you are going to be a helper to the Lakota.” The elder agreed so when she came out of the cave she came out as the buffalo, the Pté Oyáte, the female buffalo nation. In her new form she gave us food, clothing, shelter, tools, weapons, and demonstrated a pattern for living well in this world. She has been with us ever since and we are so much in her debt that we call ourselves by her name. We say we are the “Lakóthā Oyáte” or we say we are the “Pté Oyáte.” Whenever we have a ceremonial gathering we always have a buffalo skull in the centre since that makes her present and we know that the entire spirit world listens to her when she speaks. We have survived because of her. Ho hétčetuelo!

Change Is Not easy

Coming to live in this world was a big change for the Lakhóta Nation. Becoming an Indigenous Anglican Church is also a time of change and we must be prepared for it. There are five suggestions that make a change like this more efficient.

1. Being uncertain is an enemy to change; we will make firm decisions.
2. As we prepare, we should understand the past and plan for future progress.
3. When slowdowns and hardships come, we will persist and move forward.
4. We celebrate victories even small ones.
5. We anticipate resistance from others and from within ourselves.

Resistance is a natural part of change. It is the “push back” whenever something is moving, as when air pushes back against a waving hand. Psychological resistance pushes back even if we want a change to take place. Talk to anyone who has ever been on a diet, for example. Even if you want that change to happen, something in us still wants a doughnut. This is resistance and we will see it in ourselves. Remember when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt to freedom and their own country? They complained that the food was not good and they wanted to go back even if it was back to slavery. Expect resistance and move through it.

The Legacy of Trauma

History has given every Indigenous person some level of trauma. Whether you went to residential school or it was your parents or grandparents, you are carrying the wounds of trauma. I carry the wounds of trauma. Inside I am no

different from the drunks down on the streets. Every indigenous person is carrying some level of trauma. You only have to grow up around other Indigenous people to pick up trauma, but it also comes from abuse, racism, and cultural denial, experiences we have all had. It is even transferred to us genetically. Some of us have done a great deal of healing work and some of us are only beginning.

Whatever our trauma status we have to remember that trauma will influence how we relate to one another as an Indigenous Anglican Church. Basically, what this trauma has done is to reduce or seriously delay our ability to handle our emotions. At the residential schools our parents and grandparents shut themselves off to cope with their trauma and so they never became skilled with their emotions. They could not teach us how to handle our emotions either. For example, why did no one teach me that intense emotion lasts only 90 seconds? If I had known this as a teenager I could have learned to just breathe until a strong feeling diminished and became manageable. One result of this lack of emotional education is that most Indigenous people are unskilled with our emotions. People who cannot handle their emotions sometimes try to drown them with alcohol, or numb them with drugs or sex or business. Unmanaged emotions can get turned outward as vandalism and violence or they get turned inward as depression and suicide. This is one reason we see lateral violence in our communities. Don't we all know the emotional bullies we face at home or in church? Lateral violence turns our anger, frustration, and aggression on one another instead of against an enemy.

We cannot run an Indigenous Anglican Church this way. We will have to pray for healing and do our healing work to understand and use our emotions effectively. We must heal our emotional selves so we can relate to one another with the love and respect God gave to our ancestors and which God means for us all to use today.

Our Leaders

Yet another reason to be emotionally healthy is because of those who have accepted the burden to lead us. In the Anglican Church of the past, bishops sometimes followed the model of leadership that was used by kings, queens, and royalty. In more recent times bishops have acted like the president of a company, a Chief Executive Officer. Our Indigenous bishops have returned to the God-given model of the chief. A chief must always make sound decisions based on everything the chief knows from life experiences. Indigenous peoples value experiential learning much more than any book learning. A chief knows every person in the community and so relates to them as to family and relatives. Our bishops relate to us personally as any chief would. It is that personal connection that makes us want to listen to them. We listen not because they have some kind of institutional authority, but because we know they know us and have our good in their heart.

We will remember that our leaders are our chiefs in the Indigenous Anglican Church. They are not presidents of companies. They certainly are not government bureaucrats from Ottawa. They are not heartless machines. They are our elder brothers and sisters and so we listen to them and should always treat them with respect, even if we do not always agree on all points. We can

model a different kind of leadership and following that is based on respect and spiritual dignity especially in this current age.

Where Are We Going

So where are we going in this Indigenous Anglican Church? In a way we are going nowhere and in another, we are going far away from where we have been.

We are going nowhere in the sense that we are not leaving the Anglican Church of Canada. This is still our church. Some of us will continue to be active in our dioceses and parishes just as we were before. Others of us will find other forms of association and working together that will be new.

I grew up in the Episcopalian diocese of South Dakota where most of the people are from the Lakota Nation. Eighty-five percent of the communicants of that diocese are Indigenous people. We actually have only a few White people in our churches. In that diocese, we have the non-geographic deanery called the Niobrara Deanery. It was made up of those congregations that are almost entirely Indigenous people. Some congregations from surrounding dioceses with significant Indigenous populations also are members. We have our annual camp-out synod called The Niobrara Convocation. It meets for purposes of mutual interests and concerns, for worship, and most importantly, for personal and social contact. Occasionally there are resolutions considered and passed which express the mind of the

Convocation but they are not canonical and not binding on the diocese. They only inform the bishop and diocese of the mind of the Lakota people. In addition, many of these same Lakota people are also appointed by their parish or by the diocese, so were in attendance at the diocesan synod. Many have seats on committees and councils of the diocese. The Niobrara Deanery is a special ministry, a special organization and structure of the church, a special grouping but still a part of the diocese of South Dakota. This is something like what I imagine The Indigenous Anglican Church will be but with canonical and cultural patterns appropriate to Canada and The Anglican Church of Canada. In one way we are not going far at all.

In another way we are going far away from where we have been. In the distant past we have seen many good-hearted servants of God go to extraordinary effort to bring the Gospel to Indigenous people wherever we have been. But, we have also seen our church being complicit in the past with dynamics that harmed us beyond comprehension as in the residential school era or in support of the taking of our natural resources. Interwoven with all the good grace of some people there were the practices and evil damage caused by racism and colonialism. These forces exist in structures, policies, and practices independent of the good will of the church people involved. One major outcome of those intertwined historical forces was the assumption that Indigenous people were just not good enough to look after our own affairs. Government, education, social dynamics, economics, and our own church assumed we could not run our own churches nor develop our own theology. In this assumption of dependency we were supposedly not capable of being bishops, nor archbishops, nor could we manage a budget,. This assumption doesn't come only from the outside. Many of us

learned the assumption and we carry this negative self-image deep within ourselves. No one has to hold us down; we might do it to ourselves.

An Indigenous Anglican Church will heal this pattern of oppression and dependency. An Indigenous Anglican Church will develop its own theology to enhance all other Christian theology because we have good thinkers among us. An Indigenous Anglican Church will call and form its own clergy and ordain those who are our true leaders. An Indigenous Anglican Church will consecrate its own bishops as spiritual chiefs who will lead with skill and dignity. An Indigenous Anglican Church will raise up Indigenous Christians to the godly dignity that has always been ours from time immemorial.

We saw the righteous coming together of Indigenous and Introduced persons in the 14th chapter of Genesis, embodied in the medicine man and chief Melchizedek and the settler Abraham. Melchizedek brings the fruit of the earth, bread and wine, and his blessing, to the encounter. Abraham brings 10% of all he possesses and his resolution not to make a profit off Melchizedek. They come together in respect and dignity. In the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we see the meeting of these two persons as a sacred encounter in which the Christ is made known in the image of the Indigenous chief Melchizedek. It is the Indigenous person who is a preview of the Christ. The relationship of the Anglican Church of Canada and The Indigenous Anglican Church can also manifest the kingdom of heaven.

There are some who are concerned about how an Indigenous Anglican Church should be supported. Abraham thought it righteous to give one tenth

of all he possessed to the Indigenous leader Melchizedek. Should the Anglican Church of Canada do less than Abraham? One tenth of the resources of the Anglican Church of Canada would be a just portion, given that Indigenous peoples have already given the natural produce of the earth and vast amounts of land to Canada.

The Work of The Indigenous Anglican Church

The real work of an Indigenous Anglican Church would continue as it was directed by Jesus himself in the 27th chapter of the gospel of Matthew.

“...Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (vv.18-20).”

This command of Jesus is sometimes called The Great Commission. It is one of the defining directives from Jesus. We ought to think about this command because we have many brothers and sisters who have been so hurt by the residential school era that they are rightly suspicious and mistrustful of Christians and of the church. I am suspicious of any Christians and of the church because of what has happened to my relatives and to me. Wouldn't it be best to just leave Indigenous people alone instead of trying to convert us? No, because Jesus commanded us to make disciples, to baptize, to teach all others how to be Christian.

Listen carefully to what Jesus said. He did not say, to convert us to speaking English. He did not say to baptize us into European and English customs and culture. He did not say we are to make disciples of free enterprise, profit motives, or scientific thinking. Jesus said to make disciples of all nations. How is this done? By loving people as much as God loves them. We love the sinner so much that they want to follow Jesus and be baptized. We are to love the meth addict until she wants the love of God as well. We love the suicidal teenager so much that he wants to live and to live the good life God gave him. We love the sex worker on the street until she realizes that her true lover is God. We love the gay cousin, the lesbian sister, until they rejoice in the way of love they have from God. "Make disciples of all nations," Jesus said. We are to show them that God loves them more than they ever knew and so they can love the world and other people.

An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its strength as a community to love Indigenous peoples enough to begin to heal their trauma and woundedness. An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its strength as a community to expect justice and work for justice in our communities and lands as well as in other communities. An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its ceremonies to initiate children and adults into our Christian nation by baptism, confirmation, and confession. We use our ceremony of Holy Communion to nourish spiritually our new relatives and ourselves. All of these ceremonies teach us how much we are loved by God and how we can then love others. Jesus commanded us to "teach them to observe all the commands I gave you." Those commands are mainly to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves." This work will

always be the work of an Indigenous Anglican Church on every reserve and in every urban Indigenous neighbourhood.

The Mind of Christ

We began this move toward a self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church almost 50 years ago with the publication of the book, *Beyond Traplines*, which called for a new relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Anglican Church of Canada, “based on solidarity, equality, and mutual respect” (Sacred Circle Highlights, June 2, 2018). Twenty-five years ago Archbishop Michael Peers delivered an apology from the Anglican Church to Indigenous peoples. Twenty four years ago, in 1994, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada adopted a Covenant that, “coincided with the first Sacred Circle gatherings, focused on healing, self-determination, finding Indigenous voices, and establishing a true partnership with the wider church” (ibid). Thirteen years ago the Anglican Council of Indigenous People began a search for a national Indigenous bishop. Eleven years ago, in 2007 General Synod officially installed Bishop Mark MacDonald and his work was already underway. In those years a number of Indigenous bishops have been consecrated and they have led in a variety of capacities and some have now retired.

In this communal journey, how are we ordinary Indigenous people to understand ourselves? I believe we are who we should be when we transform to the mind of Christ. We speak of having the mind of Christ, in Lakḥóta we say, Čřrist Thawáčin. This thawáčin, mind, does not mean our brain nor does it mean only our thinking. It means our entire character, made

up of our thinking, our feeling, our spirit, our soul, our body, and our intuition. When all of this has a focus, a direction, when it is working together, we say this is our mind, our *thawáciŋ*. So what should our mind be, we who are gathered here at this 2018 Sacred Circle?

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about all of our spiritual ancestors and then it says this:

“All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed he has prepared a city for them” (11:13-15).

Our biological ancestors are our Indigenous ancestors. As Christians, our spiritual ancestors come from Jesus’ nation, our spiritual ancestors are from the nation of Israel. All that they had hoped for they never got to see. They lived in hope and saw their hopes but far off. They were satisfied with seeing what they really wanted in the distance. But, my brothers and sisters, we now see, on the horizon, a spiritual homeland in an Indigenous Anglican Church. It may not be heaven but it is a lot closer than the colonialized and dependent church in which we were passive observers. We enter this Indigenous Anglican Church with confidence and blessing since it is what God has prepared for us. In a similar way we were dissatisfied with the colonial Anglican Church, and God is not ashamed to be our God since we

are clear that we want something better, a true church, in which we take responsibility for our divine Commission and our Anglican selves. We will preach, baptize, and teach the faith to every Indigenous nation as well as everyone else. This is a great responsibility and an even more blessed future.

The Gifts We Bring

God has made us who we are. Even from the beginning, God established our cultures, the character of our souls, and God gave us an identity. Our languages, our cultures, our ceremonies, and our understandings of ourselves are God-given. The Indian Act and the plans of the long-ago Prime Minister John MacDonald tried to change who we are. The Indian Act was an attempt to wipe out our cultures and our identities. We are here to say that all of those programs, all of those policies, all of those plans, failed! We are still here. Our cultures are here. Our identities are here. The Indian Act failed. The program to kill the Indian to save the child failed!

We are here and we bring our unique gifts to the Anglican Church of Canada. Our church was complicit with those efforts to erase our identity but we bring to the church the gift of reminding us all about what happened in the past. We bring to the church the gift of willingness to work toward reconciliation. Some day we will bring to the church total forgiveness for all that happened in the past. Eventually we will stand on a dead colonial church and see the resurrection of a church that is Indigenous to Turtle Island, that is the community of God in North America that finds true foundations in this “Kanata.”

Indigenous cultures are colourful and vibrant with the arts. Our cultures are what anthropologists call warm cultures that are expressive, artistic, musical, and highly ceremonial. An Indigenous Anglican Church is a church with good music, fancy clothes, and fancy ceremonies filled with smoke, rhythm, designs, and totem figures.

The strength of Indigenous cultures is our spirituality. We speak easily about the remarkable spiritual experiences we have and the dreams and visions that are given to us. Canadian culture is less and less religious and more and more embarrassed and silent about spiritual happenings. An Indigenous Anglican Church can help Canadian society recover its spiritual vocabulary and its boldness in speaking about its soul.

These are not our only gifts. As an Indigenous Anglican Church we bring our innate ability to be a good relative to all things. Our cultures and our ways of life have made us experts in relating well to the earth, to the spirit world, to the animal and plant nations. We know how to live in harmony with the earth and this is an ability the world desperately needs just now.

As an Indigenous Anglican Church we bring a culture highly advanced in interpersonal relationships. We value human contact more than time, more than technology, and more than money. Indigenous cultures are so highly interdependent that only an almost x-ray vision helps one negotiate close relationships. We require a very high social intelligence to live well in our communities. This is a major reason why residential school environments could never become home. An Indigenous Anglican Church will bring the gift of restoring the dignity of human relationships.

We Indigenous Anglicans have many blessings. We have the blessing of our faithful ancestors who listened to what God showed them. They protected and used all that had been revealed to them: sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies, longhouse teachings and strawberry harvesting, totem pole raisings and potlatches, angakok teachings and building kashims. These are the blessings of the Old Testament of Indigenous North America. Indigenous Anglicans also have the blessings of knowing Jesus and the teachings that our spiritual ancestors knew that would bring us joy, righteousness, and a place in heaven.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says, “ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (1:1-3a).

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:1-2).