

Common Teachings, Common Paths
June 21, 2026
National Indigenous Day of Prayer

Acts 9: 9-20

Walker

Luke 6: 27-42

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Today is National Indigenous People's Day and in the church it is the Indigenous Day of Prayer. I share some history from the United Church of Canada [website](#):

In 1971, the observance of June 21 as a National Indian Day of Prayer was formally recognized by The United Church of Canada, at the 24th General Council. In 1982 the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) called for the creation of a National Aboriginal Solidary Day. Around that time the Sacred Assembly, a national conference chaired by Elijah Harper, also had a similar call for a national holiday to celebrate the contributions of Indigenous Peoples. And the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1995) recommended the designation of a National First Peoples Day. More recently, on June 21, 2017, the prime minister issued an intention to rename this day National Indigenous Peoples Day.

The United Church has traditionally referred to the Sunday before National Indigenous Peoples Day as [Aboriginal Sunday](#). As part of acknowledging National Indigenous Peoples Day, communities of faith are invited to focus on prayer, as it was originally intended in 1971.

The following is an excerpt from *These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places* by the Rev. Dr. Chief John Snow. This book along with *Around the Sacred Fire* by Dr. James Treat, capture history and teachings from the Indian Ecumenical Conferences that were held throughout the 1970s and 80s. It was in 1971 that the Indian

Ecumenical Conference first conceived of June 21 as a National Indian Day of Prayer. In this quote, the Rev. Dr. Snow speaks of this experience:

One of the highlights of my life was hosting the North American Indian Ecumenical Conference. The event was held annually from 1971 to 1985 in the Stoney Indian Park, a magnificent setting of hills, valleys and creeks, with a buffalo herd grazing nearby amongst poplar, spruce, pine, fir and willow. The Old Bow Fort Creek flows by the sacred grounds and in the background of the Rocky Mountains tower over the camp.... "These sacred rock monuments remind me that the Great Creator is timeless, while the refreshing mountain springs and the wildlife that inhabit His hills remind me that He is generous and loving." Indigenous and non-Indigenous people came from all over North America for the four-to seven-day-long Conference. Indigenous peoples from Central and South America, New Zealand and Hawaii, and Laplanders from the old country were all warmly welcomed. Many elders came to speak and to teach the traditions and the spiritual ways of our people. In attendance were medicine people, ceremonial leaders, Chiefs, councillors, clergy, youth and children. (Snow, 233–34).

Often people would gather around the sacred fire for prayers, meditations, telling stories, sharing experiences, and encouraging one another in the journey of life. Many of us felt the presence of God, the Creator, and were touched. We felt a deeper understanding of our faith as we sat around the fire. (Snow, 234)

Many Elders at the time participated in the North American Indian Ecumenical Conference sharing their ceremonies, time, and wisdom at Stoney Indian Park, in Morley, Alberta.

Today, National Indigenous Peoples Day is a celebration of language, culture, and history. It is good to remember the Steering Committee of

the Indian Ecumenical Conference, who had the vision of setting aside June 21 as a holy day for all peoples to gather and pray.

In my journey of understanding and learning together about and with indigenous people, one of the things I have changed my perspective on is Indigenous Christians and their involvement in the faith. Upon learning the depth of pain and suffering that Indigenous people experienced as a result of residential schools run by the churches, I understood why many indigenous folk would not want anything to do with the church. I wondered, as well, why many others stayed with the church and identified themselves as Christian. I could only assume that colonialism did a very good job at convincing them that Christianity was better than their traditional ways. And while that lie that they were taught was strong and powerful, enough that many still reject their traditional ways, there was another element I did not understand. In the message of the gospel, some found meaning and even common teachings with their indigenous teachings. The love and compassion and grace exemplified in the life of Jesus was one that held meaning and survived beyond the sin and injustice that the church imposed upon them. If Indigenous people are Christian after all that was done to them by the church, then it is their choice to continue to believe in the message of the gospel and of Christ, in spite of the church. The work, I believe, we need to continue to do is support Christian Indigenous folk to reclaim their traditional ways, the ceremonies and teachings that will be healing for them, and support them to understand that both Christian and Indigenous ways can and should co-exist together, for those who are still Christian.

In today's reading from Luke, Jesus offers a variety of teachings, most are connected to the main teaching to love our enemies. They are teachings of love and compassion, but also of resistance and re-balancing the injustice of inequity in society. It is about non-violence and creating a just and equitable community. The 7 grandfather teachings that are common across indigenous cultures with some variations are also an example of living

peaceably, sustainably and with love in community. The teachings as described by the Ojibwe site [United Three Fires Against Violence](#) are:

Humility – to know that you are a sacred part of creation, and to live selflessly.

Bravery – face your fears and protect those who are vulnerable

Honesty – be yourself, and know how to use your gifts and walk through life with integrity. Do not seek to deceive yourself or others.

Wisdom – cherish knowledge and use your inherent gifts wisely and live your life by them. Recognize your differences and those of others in a kind and respectful way.

Truth – Truth is to know the importance of living life slow and meticulously and understand the importance of the journey and the destination. Show honour and sincerity in all that you say and do.

Respect – respect the balance of life and the needs of others.

Honour all of creation. Live honourably in teachings in your actions towards all things.

Love – to know love is to know peace. View your inner-self from the perspective of all teachings. This is to know love and to love yourself truly.

All these teachings work together to create community that is sustainable, in harmony with creation and one another and is one of peace.

Jesus' teachings about love, of enemies, of one another, is similar. In the text he calls us to love our enemies in three ways:

- Do good to those who hate you. Which means: do well, rightly, becomingly, truly, justly, honourably.
- Bless those who curse you. Which means: speak well of them, praise, or confer a favour on them.
- Pray for those who mistreat you. Which means: lift up to God on their behalf.

The followers of Jesus would have had to live this out with Saul who would have been hated and seen as an enemy by the Early Christians as one who was vehemently persecuting them. As we heard in the reading from Acts, Saul was healed and transformed after being blinded following an

experience of Christ on the road to Damascus. The followers of Jesus had to love Paul, as he became known, and live out these teachings of Jesus.

In the gospel, as part of his teaching to love our enemies, Jesus then continues with the instruction that if someone hits you on the cheek, offer them your other one as well. Too often, this has been interpreted to mean passively accept violence. However, it is really about non-violent resistance and leveling the playing field. Biblical Scholar Walter Wink demonstrates this well in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCgBSleCbm8> (4:19m)

Yes, Jesus could be seen as encouraging a social revolution. Turning the system upside down to recreate a system of justice and equity. That is what can happen if we truly live these words and teachings out faithfully. The same can be said for the Grandfather Teachings. Living out these teachings creates a community of love, integrity, sustainability, and peace.

I think we can see evidence of the impact of these teachings as we look at the survivors of residential school and intergenerational trauma. It could easily be viewed that given the role the church played in residential schools, that Christians and those in the church, and settlers in general could be and have been seen as enemies by the indigenous community. They would have every right to hate those of us connected to that system. And yet, what we have largely witnessed as the indigenous people reclaim their culture is loving compassion, openness to building relationship and sharing their wisdom and teaching. An example of this is what a wise knowledge keeper and helper, Shylo Stevenson said to me this week: he's willing to walk alongside me in my post-retirement community development work with the houseless. Coming together in ceremony. There is a coexistence he says, like two separate canoes going the same direction.

That is how we are called to be together in this time. Working together to build relationships acknowledging we can be on two different paths in the same direction toward peace and reconciliation. On this Indigenous Day of Prayer, may our prayer be one of God's guidance for walking together in

this direction, honoring each other and our different ways toward peace, nonviolence, and faithful resistance of injustice.