# Indigenous Day of Prayer 2021 Sermon Starter

*by Stan McKay*

## 1 Peter 2:9‒17

The first I heard of the Indigenous Day of Prayer was in the 1970s, when the Rev. John Thompson was the minister in Saddle Lake/Goodfish Lake, Alberta. The United churches collaborated with the traditional teachers in developing a ceremony of fasting and prayer by a sacred fire. It would begin at noon on June 20 and end at noon on June 21 with a feast. It was a spiritual renewing of the covenant between the Creator, the people, and creation. The 21st of June has become National Indigenous Peoples Day to the Canadian public, without awareness that it is rooted in spiritual teachings on the land.

The reading from 1 Peter begins by expressing the belief that the children of Israel are chosen by God and are a “holy nation.” In the missionary work of the church, there had been an assumption that Indigenous people could be among the chosen if we gave up our identity, our language, and our culture. This belief is acted on in the development of residential schools and day schools.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Verses 13‒17 is a section that I have labelled the Indian Act directive. It is understandable that the early church is under attack and live in fear of harm from the authorities. The compromise is that they must do what the authorities command if they are to survive. There is a challenging suggestion that we “live as free people” but “honour the emperor.”

For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13‒17)

Restrictive legislation has had a negative impact. I had a message from an Elder who works as a spiritual counsellor and ceremonial leader in a jail in Manitoba. There are almost 500 men in the jail, and she said 85 percent are Indigenous. The same percentage applies to the 11,000 children in Manitoba who are in provincial custody. The intergenerational impact of residential schools and increasing poverty are factors in this cyclical pattern.

The United Church Apology, which was made in 1986 in Sudbury, mentions the desire to “walk together.” As Indigenous people we seek to assure our children that we are among the “chosen people” and holy nations. In the struggle to maintain health and purpose during this global pandemic, we continue to act and pray with respect and love. As there is an environmental crisis and a concern about the loss of diverse life forms on our planet, we must reclaim our identity and values as Indigenous Peoples and encourage our relatives (all peoples) to share the responsibility of caring for creation so that those yet unborn may live.

On the prairies we say we are “all treaty people.” We live under the banner of a covenant relationship that was expressed in the teachings of our Elders many generations ago. The central teaching of respect is expressed in 1 Peter2:17: “Honor everyone.”

All my relations

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