# Being a Good Neighbour: Indigenous Day of Prayer 2021

*by Read Sherman*

(*See the bulletin insert at the end of this file for an outline of the entire service.*)

## For the Kid In All of Us

Theme: Explore what it means to be a good neighbour.

Visual aid: Have on hand the image of a two-row wampum belt.

### Outline

Hey kids! Have you ever thought about what makes for a good neighbour?

What are the qualities you’d want to have in a good neighbour? (*nice, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, keeps their yard up, shares…*) What would make a neighbour harder to live next to? (*mean, unfriendly, doesn’t respect their property or yours, trespasses, untrustworthy*)

In the Bible Jesus talks about how important it is to have and be a good neighbour. One time when he was asked to sum up everything he knew about God―everything he believed God wanted us to be―he talked about loving your neighbour like you love yourself as the key.

Do you kids all know that June 21 each year is National Indigenous Peoples Day? It’s a day set aside to celebrate being neighbours with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have lived here a long, long time―they were living on the land for thousands, tens of thousands of years before European people ever came to be new neighbours. Indigenous peoples know a lot about being a good neighbour.

I want to show you something very special to the Haudenosaunee people. Their traditional territory covers much of what is now upper New York state, southern Ontario, and southwestern Quebec. When European peoples started showing up in the 1600s, the Haudenosaunee wanted to be good neighbours with the newcomers. So the Elders would sit with the newcomers and agree how to be good neighbours. The people then created what you see here―called a wampum belt―as a symbol of the agreement they had made. Another word for agreement we use is the word “treaty,” and this wampum belt has two rows rather than one. Can anyone tell me why two?

Two peoples! And notice that the two lines are side by side, but they don’t cross or join together. This was because it made sense for the two peoples to live side by side but not interfere with each other. As we were saying earlier, a good neighbour is someone you care about and help, but you also want to allow them space and freedom to do their own thing just like you need space to do your own thing.

In the Haudenosaunee language, the term this kind of getting along is *kaswentha*. It means neighbours agree to travel their own self-determined path as equal parties and with mutual respect for the rights and needs of the other. Indigenous neighbours are still waiting for settlers to honour the agreements our ancestors made so long ago. That is a fact we peoples who came later really need to take to heart if we want to love our neighbours like Jesus did. Thanks for listening!

## Scripture Introductions

### Genesis 1:26‒27

Creation stories are powerful shapers of reality because they help us imagine where we came from and why we are here. Indigenous peoples have such stories that give guidance and ground them in the earth that Creator has made. Eurocentric Christians tend to hold the words of Genesis 1 and 2 as creation stories, and the short passage we are about to hear has had a powerful, and many would increasingly say, negative effect on the Eurocentric way of relating to the earth. Let’s listen now and wonder if there might be a better way.

### Matthew 22:34‒40

When looking for a compass to guide you in life and faith, you can’t do better than the teaching we are about to hear. Matthew’s gospel is filled with stories and parables of Jesus, all meant to help us discover in him the Christ, but we know not everyone in the story will agree. In one such encounter, Jesus is tested by an adversary. Who is this man, and what does he really know? How aligned is he with the faith taught in the temple, the faith, you might say, of the status quo? To find out, let’s listen.

## Finding Neighbours Everywhere: Sample Sermon

(*This reflection is geared toward White settler communities of faith. You might reflect on what would change if you were speaking to an Indigenous community of faith―or if they were speaking to you.*)

It’s Indigenous Day of Prayer in the United Church, and who is ready to celebrate? Today is a day we set apart in our church’s calendar of celebrations to honour neighbours, relatives, kin that most of us don’t get to see very often.

Or maybe that’s not quite right, for it’s possible that some of us have connections with Indigenous communities either as family or friends or―wait for it―as neighbours. It’s possible that in our neighbourhood, town, or city there are many Indigenous people we haven’t yet had the chance to meet. For so long, many of our congregations have been oriented around other communities―especially the dominant, often White, Eurocentric communities who came to these shores as Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. For so long, many of us have only gotten to know Indigenous peoples we’ve met on television news or in the movies, leaving our heads swimming in often narrow and negative stereotypes of who “they” are rather than the truth: quite simply, Indigenous peoples, like all people, our neighbours.

What else can we conclude after hearing from Matthew’s gospel? Jesus is so clear to the lawyer who asks him the question about what following God and true religion is all about. It’s about love, he says. Love for God, love for self, and love for neighbour as for self. Jesus’s answer stops the lawyer in his tracks as it can stop us in ours. This is a core teaching of our faith that suggests that paying attention to neighbourliness―how we love our neighbours, maybe especially the ones we don’t get to see very often―is essential to celebrating who Christ is and who we are as we follow Jesus day by day.

Jesus was not one to stop finding neighbours at the end of a block or within one religious, social, or ethnic community. We know from the gospels he was constantly on the move back and forth between different, often rival, groups. He seemed to have no fear of arguing with the elite lawyers, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, or even Romans who defined the power structure of his time and place. He likewise recognized, spoke, ate with, and healed people of Syrophoenician background, Samaritan background, humble people, those with no claim to power, fortune, or fame. To Jesus, God opened up possibility for relationship, friendship, where others saw only reason to condemn. His capacity to see a friend in a stranger is humbling, isn’t it? I often wonder how he managed it on a day-to-day, practical basis. Can you really go through life thinking the whole world is your neighbour?

It's a question that becomes especially captivating for a celebration of kinship like the one we gather for today. You see, for many Indigenous peoples, one could say that the whole world actually is their neighbour! The traditional teachings of many nations have long acknowledged the essential oneness―the essential neighbourliness―of all living and non-living things. Traditional knowledge, passed down from generation to generation, has opened up a spiritually rich horizon of neighbours that includes not only the clans and kin of a particular tribe or nation but also kinship with the essential elements of life such as the air, the waters, and the land with its plants and animals.

Let’s just sit with that for a moment. For many Indigenous people, what we would call the gifts of creation―the plants and animals, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea, the land warmed by the sun by day and lit by the moon at night―these gifts are as much neighbours as we are to each other. This is wisdom that comes from Indigenous peoples’ experience of living in this land for generations. Rather than hold a dominion model over creation, such as the one we inherit from our ancient Judeo-Christian myth in Genesis 1, many Indigenous peoples celebrate stories of how creation taught them how to be human, how to live respectfully and with honour among all Creator’s other beautiful creatures. It’s a whole different mindset. It’s a whole different orientation to what and who are kin. And very sadly, it’s a beautiful part of the gifts Indigenous people offered to share, but were rejected, when our settler ancestors came to these shores.

The consequences for holding such differing understandings about being neighbours has been devastating. Devastating to the generations whose ancestors signed treaties with the Crown expecting to share in the abundance of these lands with the newcomers―not be dispossessed of it. Devastating to the generations who increasingly found themselves outnumbered by the newcomers pouring into their traditional territories, newcomers who had no conception of how the land was to be treated, no conception of how to live interdependently with the animals and plants, with the waters and the air. In other words, no conception of how to be a good neighbour.

Instead of recognizing the offer to share the land, the settling peoples saw the land as ripe for the taking. Treaties were broken, reserves were created, and residential schools were built. A whole government apparatus was put together to control Indigenous peoples and their land, attempting to reduce sovereign nations to wards of the state.

Attempting, and still at it we know. We who benefit from this system―people who see the land not as living and sacred but as patches of ground to fence and resources to exploit―we are caught up in the sins of our ancestors. So many of us don’t see the lie upon which so much of Canada and our wealth is built. And this continued unwillingness to recognize our failure to be good neighbours to the peoples into whose lands we moved is a cause of grief not only for Indigenous peoples but also to those other neighbours―the land, waters, air, trees, plants, birds, animals, and fish upon which we all depend.

Despite all the harm colonization has brought to neighbours Jesus would have us love, we celebrate that Indigenous peoples are our neighbours.

If Jesus were here, can you imagine what he might suggest we do? He once told a lawyer sent to trick him his summary of faith: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” By reaching out to meet Indigenous neighbours, we can signal we’re catching on at last. Jesus had no reason to fear anyone he met because he knew each person already to be kin to him as gifts of God. To follow his lead, neither should we. Amen.

## Prayers of the People

O God, we come together as a human family, blessed to be alive, blessed to be on this land, blessed to have neighbours as diverse as your creation. You surround us with air we breathe, water we drink, all manner of living plants and animals that delight us and sustain us. Thank you, Creator, for all you provide. We take a moment in silence to ponder the blessings you give us―of family, friends, places to call home, the food we eat, the web of life in which we with all creatures live, move, and have our being. Hear us as we give thanks…

O God, we thank you for Indigenous neighbours and friends this day. And yet we lament, too. We lament that historic and contemporary racism continues to mar our relations. We lament the church’s role as beneficiaries of an economic and governance system that privileges settler peoples at the expense of the First Peoples of this land. We lament apathy in the face of the need for change, change that recognizes the sovereignty of the First Peoples and recognizes at long last, in ways that make a difference, the sacredness of the land and the need for all of us to walk humbly upon it.

O God, for the witness of strength, caring, and love of Indigenous peoples, and for the struggle for what is just and right, open our hearts this day. Encourage us to listen more, speak less, participate in the movements for change that will bring us together in good and respectful ways. Encourage us to make friends, get to know someone’s story, and share our stories too, without fear, for in Christ we know we are all kin, relatives, with you and with each other and with all living and non-living things.

Hear us now as we pray for those hurting and in pain in all our communities:

* For anyone worn down by systemic racism, including by government and by the church, that White people and those with power will change their thinking and how they live so justice will finally come.
* For anyone suffering the injustice of racial profiling, ending up involved with the law and incarcerated in prisons at a higher rate than other populations, that policing will change so justice will finally come.
* For survivors of residential schools, and their families that continue to live with that legacy, that justice will finally come.
* For people living on reserves with shortages of funds for decent housing, water, water treatment, schools, and other community infrastructure, that justice will finally come.
* For Indigenous neighbours living in urban areas, facing the challenges of prejudice and discrimination, for those living with PTSD and addiction, that justice will finally come.
* For Indigenous women and girls, facing the two evils of racism and sexism, that their lives and bodies will be respected as sacred, that justice might finally come.
* For those Indigenous women and girls who are among the thousands of murdered and missing, for them and their families, our lament at the shame of what has happened and our pledge to advocate for their safety, that justice will finally come.
* For the air, that all might breathe it clean and free, that justice might finally come.
* For the waters―marshlands, lakes, rivers, streams. For the great seas and oceans. That they might be protected for the benefit of seven generations hence, that justice will finally come.
* For the lands, forests, grass, and farmlands. For the prairies, foothills, and mountains. For their beauty, for the life that teems within, upon, and over them, for the reprioritization of the health of ecosystems over profit, so justice will finally come.
* For the animals, birds, fish, and life of all kinds whose viability is being threatened by unsustainable human activity, that their lives will begin to count so that justice will finally come.

All this, as well as the prayers of our hearts, O God, we lift up to you. Hear our celebrations as we claim anew our kinship with you and with all our relations. Hear our laments, and grow our hearts full of compassion for self and other as we leave this place to be a better friend and neighbour to all. We pray in the name of Creator, who is Mother and Father of us all. We pray as well in the Spirit of Christ, whose words continue to guide our lives today as we say: (*Lord’s Prayer*)

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## \*\*Welcome! Bienvenue!\*\*

## Your Church Name Here

4th Sunday after Pentecost, June 20, 2021

Indigenous Day of Prayer

### Reflection

No one can paddle two canoes at the same time. *Bantu proverb*

### WE GATHER AS COMMUNITY

#### Welcome

#### Acknowledging Our Kinship

One: Creator, we come together today as diverse, united peoples to give thanks to you, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

**All: We come to listen, to learn, to sing and pray, to consider our place in the order of things you have created and are creating.**

One: It is right and good to give thanks for the land on which we stand, for this is wisdom we learn from Indigenous peoples of this land―that we are one with the earth, its waters, air, animals, and plants.

**All: Such wisdom, our interdependence with all life, is something too easy to forget in our busy lives! It is a gift and a challenge to us to remember.**

One: And so we take time to acknowledge the lands on which we now live.

**All: Many of us have come from other places, arriving from distant shores, our families arriving years ago or some of us more recently. When settlers came, they were met by others who** **were already here, already knew these lands, already lived rich and full lives based on ancient and proud cultures.**

One: Let us take time to name the peoples of this land now. I invite you to speak out loud or in silence the local people(s) who traditionally and still call these lands home. If you are aware of the status of Indigenous claims to this land (*unceded, treaty, etc.*), please name this too (*the people speak the names…*).

O God, as we acknowledge the peoples who have lived on and stewarded these lands since time immemorial, and their continued claims to the land, help us to become neighbours that we might live together in better ways.

**All: For we are all kin in Christ, “All My Relations,” with each other and this earth, its waters, air, animals, and plants.**

#### Gathering Hymn

“Like a Rock” (*More Voices* 92)

#### Call to Worship (adapted from Psalm 62)

One: Be still my soul and wait for God: from God comes my salvation.

**All: God alone is my rock; I shall never be shaken.**

One: On God rests our deliverance and our honour.

**All: My mighty rock, my refuge, my strength is in God.**

One: Trust in God at all times, O people.

**All: In love, we pour out our hearts before the Lord our God.**

#### Prayer of Approach

**Holy One, you are our rock,   
a foundation upon which we stand.   
Fill our hearts now with joy at your deep, abiding presence.  
Encourage us by the teachings of Christ to live  
with care and compassion for self, friend, and neighbour.  
Bless us now as we reflect on our relations  
with Indigenous peoples―our kin―  
as diverse yet united peoples. Amen.**

#### Hymn of Praise

“Teach Me, God, to Wonder” (*Voices United* 299)  
“Called by Earth and Sky” (MV 135)

#### For the Kid in All of Us

### WE ENCOUNTER SACRED STORY

#### Scripture

Genesis 1:26‒27 – Humans shall have “dominion”  
Matthew 22:34‒40 – You shall love your neighbour as yourself

#### Meditation: “Finding Neighbours Everywhere”

#### Hymn

“As a Fire Is Meant for Burning” (VU 578)  
“What Does the Lord Require of You” (VU 701)  
“They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” ([by Peter Scholtes](https://hymnary.org/text/we_are_one_in_the_spirit#Author), [Tune: ST. BRENDAN’S](https://hymnary.org/text/we_are_one_in_the_spirit#tune))

### OUR RESPONSE TO LISTENING AND HEARING

#### The Offering

(*Suggested to benefit a local Indigenous friendship or other service organization*)

#### Prayer of Dedication

#### Prayers of the People

#### The Lord’s Prayer, Notre Père

### WE GO FORTH TO BE THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

#### Hymn

“Though Ancient Walls” (VU 691)  
“If You Will Trust in God to Guide You” (VU 286)  
“Praise with Joy the World’s Creator” (VU 312)

#### Commissioning and Benediction

One: As God’s united yet diverse peoples, we go to become neighbours to each other and to the earth.

**All: For in Christ we are all kin. We are called to be neighbours, to share generously with each other.**

One: As we learn more, respect more, love more, we all can gain, not lose!

**All: God as Creator will be our rock. Christ and Spirit be our guides.**

#### Choral Benediction

“Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (VU 308)