

..... **Daily Devotions**

Devotions – July 4 – 10, 2021

By Conference 7 Pastors

Pastor Melinda VanderSys (Sunday – Friday)

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church and First Presbyterian Church, Newberry, MI

By Pastor Rita Chirala (Saturday)

Faith Lutheran Church, Sault Ste. Marie, MI

Introduction

Portions of the devotions I’ve written for these few days are elements from Pow-Wow Services that I shared during the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Veteran’s Pow-Wow weekends and at various times throughout the years. I lived on the reservation for sixteen years and served Lutheran Church of the Wilderness near Bowler, WI, for eight of those years.

I have also shared some of these elements with my congregations in Newberry. Since I am not of American Indian heritage, I asked permission via a message to a couple of my Native American sisters who live on the reservation, Molly and Leah. I said that, if I were there in person with them, I would offer them tobacco, a tradition that occurs when one asks for permission or assistance. My sisters said yes. Molly commented, “Spread the love and teach.”

I would like to thank the members of the Northern Great Lakes Synod who overwhelmingly passed the resolution to Repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery at the Synod Assembly in May. I pray that, as we move forward in our work together, we grow in our appreciation of the Native American culture.

Sunday, July 4, 2021

Text: Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Today’s devotion for the first day of the week invites you to share the Native American *Prayer of the Four Directions and Mother Earth and Father Sky*. You may designate someone to be the leader or read it all together.

Prayer of the Four Directions

And Mother Earth and Father Sky

L) Creator is the Center of Creation. The central reality of Creator’s plan for the world is the central reality of our lives. As we face each of the four directions, as we kneel to Mother Earth, and as we reach to the Heavens, we will respond in prayer. Following each prayer, we will return to face the center, reminded each time that it is our Brother who is able to bring healing and salvation and who, by His Spirit, is able to renew the face of the earth.

L) First let us all face a center point. (All face center, pause)

L) The start of life's journey, the new day, is the East. It is the place of beginnings, first light, and the possibility of starting again.

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us face East (all face East, pause) and let us pray:

ALL) Enable us, Creator Spirit, to be wise in our use of the resources of the earth, sharing them in justice, partaking of them in thankfulness. (All face center, pause)

L) The South holds the warmth of summer. It is a time of innocence, of learning, and growth.

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us face South (all face South, pause) and let us pray:

ALL) May we walk good paths, Creator Spirit, living on this earth as sisters and brothers should, rejoicing in one another's blessings, sympathizing in one another's sorrows, and together with You renewing the face of the earth. (All face center, pause)

L) The West reminds us of the wisdom of maturity with the approaching of the sunset. It is the time of parenthood, responsibility, and good sense – the time to teach, acknowledge, and give thanks.

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us now face West (all face West, pause) and pray that the Spirit of Creator may again breathe over the waters making them pure, making them fruitful. Let us pray:

ALL) We pray that we too may be purified so that life may be sustained and nurtured over the entire face of the earth. (All face center, pause)

L) The North holds the hard, cleansing wisdom of the time of winter and white hair; the elders breathe through the sacred pipe, the grandparents who, on life's great circle, are closest to the little children.

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us face North (all face North, pause) and let us pray:

ALL) May the air we breathe be purified so that life may be sustained and nurtured over the entire face of the earth. (All face center, pause)

L) From Mother Earth comes all that has life. (Bend and touch Mother Earth and say):

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us kneel or touch symbolically Mother Earth and let us pray:

ALL) May we walk gently upon the Earth and leave our footprints softly on what we touch.

L) We raise our hands toward Father Sky. In love, Father Sky embraces all the Earth with His love. (Raise your hands and extend your palms toward the sky.)

L) You have sung us into existence. Let us raise our hands to Father Sky and pray:

**ALL) May we see the vastness of Your arms and feel Your embrace of love at all times.
A-Ho! (which translates to Amen)**



Monday, July 5, 2021

Text: Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

No, it is not a typing error that this is the same text from Sunday!

Many Native Americans (from my experience) use the term *Creator* when talking about *God*. It does not disrespect or minimize the power of the Holy One. One doesn't have to go far in the Bible to make the connection that God **is** Creator.

In Genesis 1:1-2 (above), God *created*. In the verses following this, God *spoke* and it was *created*:

³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle,

and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

*²⁷ So God created humankind in His image,
in the image of God He created them;
male and female He created them.*

The Book of Psalms is filled with references to God as Creator:

Psalm 8:3: *When I look at Your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that You have established;*

Psalm 104:24: *O Lord, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all;
the earth is full of Your creatures.*

And my personal favorite, Psalm 148:1-5:

Praise the Lord!

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise Him in the heights!*

*² Praise Him, all His angels;
praise Him, all His host!*

*³ Praise Him, sun and moon;
praise Him, all you shining stars!*

*⁴ Praise Him, you highest heavens,
and You waters above the heavens!*

*⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for He commanded and they were created.*

These are just a few examples where one may make the connection of God as Creator. What other verses do you find in the Bible where God is acknowledged as Creator?

Let us pray:

Creator God, we thank You for the blessings of this day. We thank You for all that You have created, including us. Open our minds and our hearts to understand that You are our Creator. Amen.



Tuesday, July 6, 2021

Text: Mark 3:31-35

³¹ Then His mother and His brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to Him and called Him. ³² A crowd was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for You.” ³³ And He replied, “Who are My mother and

My brothers?”³⁴ And looking at those who sat around Him, he said, “Here are My mother and My brothers!”³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.”

Who is your family?

In the Native American community that I served, people introduced themselves by ancestral relationship, naming themselves, their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and even further back in time.

My name is Melinda Jo Pangburn Shriner VanderSys. I am the daughter of Macklin and Ethel (Brubaker) Pangburn. My grandparents were Timmy and Georgia Brubaker, and Joseph and Emma (Lipp) Pangburn. My middle name is from my paternal grandfather.

Sometimes other family members would be mentioned - sisters, brothers, aunties, and uncles.

I developed a very close relationship with many people on the reservation in Wisconsin. If I were back there, I may name my Native American sisters: Leah, Sheila, Kristy, Molly, and Tammy; my brothers back there, Bud, Greg, Lee, and Doug. And then there are kids from my former congregation that I called *my kids* even though they weren't biologically *my kids*. I used to tease my late husband that we should receive child support for these kids since they spent so much time at our home!

In our text for today, Jesus identified those at the table with Him *as His family – brother and sister and mother*. They weren't biological family members. They weren't necessarily close friends. They were everyday people who gathered to hear Him. To listen to Him preach. To follow Him.

Jesus identifies Himself as a part of our family, our Brother. His words are an invitation to all of us to be at that table with Him, to be family: black, white, Asian American, Native American, mixed-race, white-collar, blue-collar, unemployed, sick, healthy, those taking their last breath, citizen, immigrant, refugee, all political affiliations or no political affiliation, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, straight, Christian, yes, even the non-Christian (remember, Jesus said, “*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.*” John 10:16)

Thank You, my Brother Jesus.

Let us pray...

Creator God, we thank You for the blessings of this day. We thank You for our family; those who are biologically related and those who are not. We thank You for our siblings in Christ and our relationship to our Brother Jesus. Amen.



Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Text: Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold His own Son, but gave Him up for all of us, will He not with Him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I have performed many, many funerals in my thirteen years of ministry (ten of them as an ordained pastor). One year I performed twenty-five funerals and memorial services. That's about one every other week. The most difficult time was when I performed three funerals in five days and all those who walked on were related.

Typical Native American funerals last four days (again, from my experience). Once a person walks on (passes away), a fire is lit, usually at the person's home or a relative's home. This sacred fire remains lit twenty-four hours a day until the time of the funeral service. Firekeepers (typically male) tend to the fire, adding wood as necessary, and having available the four sacred herbs (cedar, sweetgrass, sage, and tobacco). The Firekeepers ensure that no trash is thrown into the fire and no alcohol is consumed near it. The fire is sacred.

During these four days, Native Americans believe that the spirit of their loved one travels in the four directions (see the ***Prayer of the Four Directions and Mother Earth and Father Sky*** devotion from July 4). The loved one's spirit visits various places it has been, places it had wished to go, as well as visiting loved ones. Many will tell stories of being visited in a dream or by a symbol (seeing an eagle, finding a feather, hearing a special sound, etc.), believing it was the spirit of their loved one contacting them to let them know they are safe.

Family, friends, and community members visit the home to pay their respects. They have an opportunity to walk around the sacred fire and offer a gift of the four sacred herbs in the fire. Most also offer a prayer for the loved one's safe journey.

Food is abundantly prepared and served during the four days. Everyone who comes to visit the family brings something, even if it's a bag of potato chips, a pack of paper plates, or a box of tissues. Every gift is welcomed and used.

This can be an exhausting time for the family. One wants to stay awake to visit with those who come throughout the four-day/twenty-four hours a day wake. But sheer exhaustion combined with grief rapidly takes over and one needs to find some rest. It is at that time that siblings usually take over as greeters at the wake.

The fire is allowed to go out at the time of the service. It is never put out with water; it is left to naturally extinguish.

There are two important teachings from the Native American community where I served in Wisconsin that I would like to share with you today, teachings that I share at almost every funeral still:

First, we never say goodbye. We say *'til we meet again*. Someday we will see *our loved one* and all our loved ones gathered together in the eternal home promised to us through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the second teaching is this: As long as a person's name is spoken, they shall never be forgotten. It is important to continue to share the stories, the pictures, the laughter, and yes, even the tears, all those special things you remember about *your loved one*. For they uniquely touched your life and will forever be with you.

Let us pray...

Creator, source of love, comfort us as we remember our loved ones who have walked on. Ease our grief and turn our mourning into dancing, knowing that our loved ones are with You. Amen.



Thursday, July 8, 2021

Text: Isaiah 40:31

***“...but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.”***

I used a term a couple of times in yesterday's devotion – *walk on*. Again, from my experience living on a reservation, instead of saying a person died or passed away, many Native Americans say their loved one *walked on*.

My late husband, the Rev. Stephen Shriner, had suffered a double brainstem stroke in 1999. The stroke caused him to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life; though, through months and months of therapy, he was able to walk with assistance. When he walked on in 2008 (from pancreatic cancer), the only comfort I could find in his death was that he *walked on*. He was free from the

physical restraints. All his ailments and diseases disappeared. He *walked on* into the waiting arms of Jesus. I still picture this in my mind. What a beautiful memory.

Let us pray...

Creator, we know that You received our loved ones in Your loving arms. We wait with hope of the resurrection in Jesus Christ for the day we walk on – the day we will be joined with You and all our loved ones. Amen.



Friday, July 9, 2021

Text: John 13:34:

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

For my final day of devotions, I want to share with you some other elements from Pow-Wow Services and other services I’ve held throughout the years. I pray that you appreciate them as much as I do.

We Are All Related

L) We share our stories

ALL) Each of us brings a unique story and gifts from the Creator.

L) Our stories are about journeys of faith.

ALL) We walk a path of righteousness.

L) We share our path with all Creation.

ALL) We are all related!

(Eastern Cherokee Prayer Tradition)

I often use the following as a Benediction:

P) Walk tall as the trees,

C) Live strong as the mountains,

P) Be gentle as the spring winds,

C) Keep the warmth of the summer sun in your heart

ALL) And the Great Spirit will always be with you. A-Ho. (Native American proverb)

And I often use the following as a Dismissal:

P) When we see the changes of day and night,

C) The stars in the sky,

P) We realize

C) It is the work of someone more powerful than man. (Chased by Bears-Santee Sioux)



Saturday, July 10, 2021

Text: Mark 13:33

“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.”

Jesus also warns us to “stay awake” because no one knows the day, the hour, or the year, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, nor anyone on earth or in heaven. Only the Father in heaven, our Lord, knows the time. It is not revealed to anyone except our Father in heaven. Therefore, Jesus asks us to “stay awake” and watchful, four times in this Gospel.

How do we pay attention and know whether we are awake or not?” These are good questions to challenge ourselves with today. Let’s go back and remind ourselves about the Ten Commandments, which we probably learned during our confirmation classes. The first and foremost commandment is to love your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength. Have we followed God’s commandment by loving our God with all our hearts, minds, and strength? The second important commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Have we tried to love our neighbor? Have we made an effort to call or text our neighbors, friends, or church members to find out how they are doing in this time of crisis? If not, I would encourage you to do it; find time to stay connected especially during this time of the pandemic.

When we start to practice the first commandment, we feel God’s presence, joy, and connectedness to God, community, and neighbor, as well as to ourselves. By practicing this, we not only encourage one another but also become a blessing to each other. The first commandment is one key to “staying awake.”

We accomplish good works in our communities, neighborhoods, and the world by means of the Holy Gospel, as well as by our actions. We as Christians must live out the Gospel so that our neighbors can witness the love and peace of Christ. The objective of our witness to Christ and our good works is the Glory of God and staying awake. The goodness comes from the grace of God. We glorify God by our good deeds towards our neighbors and become true witnesses of Christ. The never-ending grace of the Cross always guides us.

We have a new and loving relationship with God, neighbor, and with the creation. Jesus continues to guide us at the Baptismal Font, Communion Table, at the Altar, and outside the four walls of the church.

“Stay awake” and “watchfulness” are close companions if not two sides of the same coin; for both sides of the coin are illustrated with the words “Awake.” Our good works should not be limited to ourselves or to certain people; they should reach out to the world.

Jesus is with us always to keep us watchful and to help us to stay awake. God desires to bless all humankind, to give them the Holy Spirit, and to enable them to perform good works in the community. God became human and came in search of us, and through the Holy Spirit, we become people of God in faith, hope, and love.

Many times, we do not understand that the Holy Spirit guides us throughout our lives and gives us the courage to do what we have been called to do in life. I came to this country in 2014. I did not think that I would be able to gather enough courage to come so far away to pursue my studies at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. My son was in third grade at the time, and he could barely understand what was going on in our lives. It was a very hard decision, as well, for my parents, and it was my first time traveling internationally. I came with a half-tuition scholarship and succeeded only with the help of God. God made everything possible for me because God was holding my hand and walking with me in this journey and still is. This same God, with His everlasting and never-ending Love, is guiding you and me to stay awake, to be watchful for His “coming.”

Therefore, Jesus warns us *“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. And I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”* (Mark 13: 33 & 37). **Amen.**

