

July 11, 2021 – Linda Stumpf

Reflection:

Here we are in the middle of summer and what a summer it has been! I'm sure many of you have been spending time outdoors, enjoying the flowers and the first fruits of your gardens. Watching birds at your feeders or fountains and listening to their songs as they welcome the morning. Sitting in the shade of trees on these hot days or swimming or hiking on a cool woodland trail. Such a beautiful world we live in!

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof".

"The earth and everything on it, the world and all who live in it belong to God".

But that is not generally the way we view it, is it?

So much of life on this earth revolves around issues of ownership and control. What is mine and what is yours? Land ownership is pretty important to us. It is what brought my grandfather here early in the last century to claim a parcel of land and make it his own. It was my father and his brother who really took up the challenge and so I grew up on a farm and now I am a land owner too.

When we recall the stories of the Hebrew scriptures it was always about a journey to a promised land. First Abraham and then Moses leading his people out of slavery to a land they could call their own. During the years surrounding the 2nd World War, as it became increasingly unsafe for Jewish people to live in European lands, they began emigrating in large numbers. The Jews were on the move again looking for a place they could call their own and be safe. Palestine, which was under British control at the time, the place we often call "The Holy Land", was chosen by the U.N. as the location for a new state of Israel. "A land without a people for a people without a land"

they said, ignoring the fact that Palestinians: Arab and Jew, Christian and Muslim were already living there, initiating a struggle for land that continues today.

We have been part of a similar struggle here in Canada ever since our ancestors arrived and ignoring the fact that people already lived here, claimed the land for themselves. Yes, there were treaties but the treaties were about sharing the land and walking side by side together. The First Nations seemed to have a greater understanding of today's scripture: "The earth and everything on it, the world and all who live in it belong to God". My experience with Indigenous folk is that they love with a great deal of gratitude for the earth and what they have received from it. We certainly got a sense of that from the words from Chief Seattle we heard. Robin Wall Kimmerer, Indigenous Environmental Scientist, teacher and author of the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* spoke in a CBC interview about the Indigenous world view in which all living things are seen as "our relatives". Rather than "material resources" she prefers the phrase "earthly gifts". She spoke of reciprocity in the way that we take or receive gifts that are given to us. She called this "The Honourable Harvest" in which you ask permission, give gratitude, take as little as needed and give back. This is not entirely new to us. Remember the story of manna in the desert? The Hebrew people received from God, first what they needed each day and no more. A question Robin often asks is "Is this a sustainable practice?" It is a question that is long overdue.

The words of the psalm took me back to the beginning of the Bible and the creation story in Genesis. Each day of Creation the words are repeated and God saw that it was good."

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us. Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals, and everything that crawls on the ground.”

²⁷Humankind was created as God’s reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God make them,

²⁸God blessed them and said, “Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth-and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things on the earth!”

³¹God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good-very good. Evening came, and the morning followed-the sixth day.

Our scriptures tell us we were meant to be responsible stewards of all of God’s good creation. Today’s psalm asks the question: “Who has the right to ascend YHWH’s mountain? Who is allowed to enter YHWH’s holy place? Those whose hands are clean and whose hearts are pure, who do not worship idols, or make false promises.” These words refer to the Temple in Jerusalem but they still give on pause to think. Are my hands clean? Is my heart pure? What or who do I really worship? Have I kept my promise to live with respect in creation?

This year the extreme weather conditions have made it very clear that we are experiencing climate change and the results are and can be devastating. It may not affect us a great deal in our lifetime but it certainly will our children and grandchildren. We cannot continue to live in the unsustainable ways we have been. There is no time to lose. We are at the 11th hour.

It has been hard to talk about this here where our economy is based so much on farming and oil production, both of which we know contribute greatly to the carbon in the atmosphere that causes climate change. It won't be easy that's for sure but this pandemic has shown us how quickly things can happen in an emergency situation and we have a climate emergency. It is time to act accordingly. People who have been studying the situation and coming up with answers such as Seth Klein, whose book "A Just War", we had in our book study group emphasizes a just transition. For the sake of our children and grandchildren as well as the earth, I think we need to listen to them and encourage our decision makers to act accordingly. What we are doing now is not enough.

When Robin Wall Kimmerer was asked if she didn't get discouraged with the way things were going, she quoted one of her students who said she felt she was living in a most important time. "I am standing on the brink" she said. "Where I stand matters. Every choice I make has a message."

The psalm ends with an invitation "Fling wide the gates, Open the ancient doors, And the Glorious Liberator will come in." This is an invitation to open our hearts to God so that we can truly be in God's image the responsible stewards of creation we were meant to be. That is where freedom resides.

There is a Japanese saying that goes "My barn having burned down, I can now see the moon."

Finally: the wise words of Chief Seattle:

"What befalls the earth

befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.

We did not weave the web of life.

We are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web,

we do to ourselves.

Where we stand matters,

Every choice has meaning.”