

Native American Awareness Sunday

4/22/2012

by Gail Claus, Lay Associate Pastor

East (Red): Creation

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:1-5

Before any white man had come to the great continent of North America, clearly meaning that the Native Americans had never seen or heard a Bible or had Christian religious training, their language included a word for 'heaven.' We already heard that their supreme being was named Yowa. This is a name so sacred that saying it aloud was restricted to certain priests. Other people referred to Yowa the Great Spirit. Yowa was the unity of three beings above, called "The Elder Fires Above." One cannot help but to contrast this to our Trinity – God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The oral tradition kept their legends and beliefs alive; generation-to-generation passed along the story of creation by the great spiritual being. The great spiritual being created the earth, sun, moon and stars. After the creator God Yowa had given form to the earth, he appointed the sun and the moon to govern the world. Then, fire was commanded to take care of the needs of mankind using smoke as its messenger.

How similar this is to the creation story we know!

The indigenous peoples had a great sense for beauty in Yowa's creation. Hear the words that show the reverence for beauty:

Thank you Great Spirit, for all that you have given us. Thank you for the beauty of the universe that you created; the trees, the sky, the mountains, the rain. All things hold beauty in themselves and all are related and touch each creature of the earth. You created the rhythm and pattern of the universe in a harmony of movement, sight and sound. Help us to appreciate your creation and to live with our eyes, ears, and hearts open to your message.

We can see a people who hold the Mother earth and the skies with great reverence. We can learn from the Native Peoples to take time to appreciate the world that God created for us to care for.

South (White): Christ Visited the Native Americans

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Colossians 3:12

Yowa created the world in seven days, much as is told in Genesis. Human life began from the earth. God made the first man of red clay and he was an indigenous person. Woman was made from one of his ribs. All the fruits of the land were ripe.

Prophets and preachers taught the peoples to obey Yowa and their parents. Just as we know from our Bible, the Native Peoples were warned of an approaching flood and that the world would only be destroyed by water once. Indeed, there is a flood story similar to our great flood, as recounted in Noah's Ark.

The prophets taught that the next time the world would be destroyed by fire when Yowa would send a shower of pitch and then a shower of fire that would burn everything.

We have found that the Native Peoples believed in a life after death – our equivalent of heaven and hell. There is a great belief in spirits, and a person's spirit was thought to retrace his life on earth after he died.

After death, the good and bad would be separated. The good would take a path that would lead to happiness and where it would always be light. The bad would be urged on a different path that would lead to a deep chasm where they would be transfixed with red hot bars of iron and be tormented forever.

How could the stories and knowledge of heaven and hell be explained other than by saying Jesus was with them?

West (Black): The Sacred Tree

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James 4:10

Planted by the Creator, the Sacred Tree is a tree for all peoples of the world. It is a place to gather and find healing, power, security and wisdom. This is a sturdy tree – its roots spread deep into Mother Earth. The branches reach upward like hands praying to Father Sky.

The fruits of this tree are what have been given to the people by the creator: love, compassion, generosity, patience, wisdom, justice, courage, respect and humility. These gifts are so similar to those we find in Galatians!

The ancient ones taught that the life of the tree is the life of the people. Should the people move far from the tree, forget the nourishment of its fruit, or attempt to destroy the tree, great sorrow will fall upon them. People will lose all of their power and cease to dream and have visions. They will quarrel among themselves and be unable to tell the truth. They will forget how to survive in their own land. Their lives will become filled with anger and gloom.

What a travesty it would be for Native Peoples to lose all of the beauty the tree had to offer! It was foretold that these actions of moving away from the tree would happen. However, the tree would never die. And as long as the tree lives, the people would live.

After moving so far from the gifts of the tree, the people would fall into a deep, long sleep. When they awakened as if from a drugged sleep, they would try to find peace to their lives and search for the tree -- timidly at first and then with great urgency. Wise elders and leaders, humble, loving and dedicated souls, would guide anyone who was honestly and sincerely seeking along the path leading to the protective shadow of the Sacred Tree.

North (Yellow): A Time For Everything

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17

We are now going to hear two passages of the Native Peoples, from 2000 years ago, long before other peoples arrived at the land of the Americas, Hawaii and Alaska. You will likely notice similarities to beloved passages from our Bible.

The first is called A Time for Everything.

Everything on our mother, the earth, has a season. There is a time to be born and a time to go to the Spirit world. There is a time to plant our corn and a time to pick it. There is a time to tear down a lean-to and a time to build a cabin; a time to kill for food and a time to heal that which has been injured. There is a time to laugh, to sing and to dance. There is a time to be quiet and listen to the voice of Yowa. There is a time to repair the skins that need sewing, and a time to make new skins. There is a time to love your squaw and a time to play with your children. There is a time of war and a time of peace. Our people should enjoy the good Yowa has given them, for whatever Yowa does is done for the good of all of us, and if Yowa does it, it is good and will last forever, for Yowa can do no wrong. Hear me, O, my people, and listen to the voice of Yowa, for there is a time for everything.

And a second passage of the oral tradition is so similar to our version of the Lord's Prayer.

O, Great Spirit, whose home is in the sky-world, we honor your name Yowa. Your kingdom has come within us, and your will is our will on our mother earth as it in the sky-world. We are thankful for the food you give us each day. If we owe any neighbor forgive us as we forgive those who owe us. There are many trials on many trails but Yowa will guide us safely home. The kingdom belongs to Yowa who has all power. Hear me, O, my people, and give glory to Yowa as long as you live.

We have been blessed this morning to develop an appreciation of the indigenous peoples. Let us go away with a deep appreciation of their faith and the similarity to our own Christian religion.

Amen.