

“The Power of Truth and Wisdom”

June 26, 2022
New Hope and York Pines United Church
York United Ministries
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

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. As the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear the wisdom and truth that you are saying to us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Genesis 1:26-28

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humans 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 humans in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

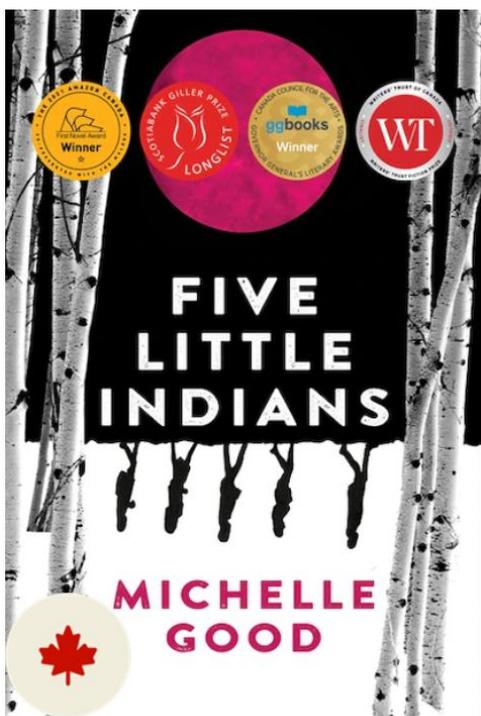
1 John 5:6-12

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ There are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. ⁹ If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. ¹⁰ Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

This is the word of God. **Thanks be to God.**

< Children's Time >

It is great to see you again, my friends! It was great that we gathered at a park and had a picnic. When Denae was leaving, I said, "see you on August 7th!" And she replied, "No, see you tomorrow!" That was a good catch, Denae: I was just captured by my summer plans at the moment. Planning is very important. You can't be a good person if you cannot plan for the future. Future planning is not about declaring that I'm going to be a superstar, but preparing for a day, week, month, season, and year. And what is your plan for summer and church closure? Of course, we'll gather on July 2nd and the fourth Sunday for the praise band. This is possible because we "planned" it. Without planning, you will be ending up watching Tiktok or playing computer games for your whole summer. That's not what you want, do you?



One of your summer plans, I'd like to add one more good thing to it. Read this book: titled, *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good.

Why this book? This is the bestselling book in Canada this year, and it includes Indigenous stories. We are not indigenous, and we need to learn from them to understand Canadian society and God's calling. God's calling is not just in the Bible; we can find God's calling in newspapers, non-religious books, or even others' life stories. Besides, today is Indigenous Sunday, and we celebrate Indigenous wisdom that supports our spiritual

life. So, this is the conclusion: add to your summer plan to read this book. See you on July 10th at 10 a.m. at this sanctuary. May God be with you!

<Reflection>

About 15 years ago, I stayed at an Ojibwe community in Magnetawan, Ontario. The location was near the French River, and my church members and I had a mission trip with the Ojibwe people in the reserved town. Without much knowledge of Ojibwe tradition, we anyhow wanted to start building connections and relationships with them. We offered a feast and a Sunday worship service, and the chief even officially offered a cleaning ceremony for all of us. It was their hospitality, and we were also invited to their house and had some conversations about their life and philosophy. Besides the conversation, I found very interesting things in their homes. First, they had a wooden board game, and the way to play and the framework of the game were very similar to the traditional Korean game called Yut(윷). The other thing is that they displayed a special round decoration that looks like a yin-yang design. But their design had three-axis, and Koreans also use the design called three Tae-kuk. I was surprised and asked them what the game and the design were, and they answered the game and the design came from their ancestors.

Later I had further research on the relationship between Asians and the First Nations in North America, and I am still surprised that Koreans' and First Nations' words are very similar, and some are even identical. For example, Koreans call swing '그네,' and it is the same as a language of a First Nation tribe. Koreans call females *yeo-ja* 여자, while a First Nations language call it 가시나, or 딸, meaning a lady or a daughter in Korean. Modern linguistics categorizes Korean and First Nations languages in one category. The researchers are intrigued, and now they are excavating the similarities of lifestyle and habits and even the uniqueness in the blood. The more we study, the more we are intrigued, finding similarities. So does indigenous story and philosophy.

And the indigenous wisdom is so timely for both Christians and modern people in terms of ecology and harmonious lifestyle.

At some point, Western theology had interpreted Genesis chapter 1, particularly verse 28, as God's mandate of ruling nature. It says;

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

When nature is only vast and powerful, and only the source of human benefit, the interpretation of the dominion of nature couldn't be misinterpreted. Humans literally need to survive the harsh condition of nature. However, as we all know, humans' unlimited and unbridled greed has pervaded since the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, the anthropocentric interpretation needs to be re-interpreted according to the times. I don't mean that the interpretation before the Industrial Revolution was wrong. I mean that we, Christians, have gradually been aware that our interpretations are diverse and changeable, although God's word itself is unchangeable. Some of us might have been confused because we need new interpretations of the same words in the Bible. It is somewhat tricky, but I'll walk you through.

The word of God is unchangeable; however, we changeably re-interpret the word of God in accordance with the calling and request from God. That is the tricky part. Does this mean that the word of God is changeable? Can you answer that? I would rather change the question. Does the word of God allow us to interpret the Bible according to the times? Oh,

yes. God is calling us in various ways with the same Scripture. When Jesus says, "Follow me," it could be a work of activism for some people and also could be a work of support for others. God's command is one, but it appears differently for each and every one of us. Then can we name what is unchangeable and what is changeable? The word of God is unchangeable, and that word comes to us differently, and it requires layers of interpretation according to an individual situation. In this respect, what is unchangeable is our authenticity in responding to God's word.

Our authentic responses form from the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit resides in the dynamics of truth and wisdom. So when we dedicate ourselves to acting and reacting from the truth, we say that the power of the Holy Spirit comes to us, stirs us, transforms us, and eventually, we share the power of the Holy Spirit within us to create another layer of truth and wisdom. In all the courses of the dynamic of truth, we call it the work of the Holy Spirit. We, modern Christians, have difficulties grasping the work of the Holy Spirit because it wasn't exclusively witnessed or written by Jesus' disciples. And even Jesus just hinted at the clue of the Holy Spirit, not introducing the Spirit to us. However, among the testimonies in the Bible, 1 John chapter 5 outstandingly describes the Spirit; it says, in verse 6, the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The Holy Spirit testifies to God and Jesus Christ, and the Spirit has truth, meaning the Holy Spirit has the power of truth. The truth that testifies God and Jesus is the Holy Spirit. If we find our calling from some part of the Scripture, and we decide to dedicate ourselves to responding to the calling, then we become embedded in the work of the Holy Spirit because we testify for God and Jesus. Suppose we re-interpret Genesis chapter 1 according to

our calling, learning from the First Nation's wisdom, and therefore, we authentically respond to the calling and wisdom. In that case, we become an agent of the Holy Spirit because we are doing our part to testify for God and Jesus towards contemporary culture and mindset. In that case, we fully understand 1 John chapter 5 that the Holy Spirit is the truth.

The wisdom of the First Nation refreshes our Christian worldview. We re-encounter the word of God and God's love through it. Throughout the engagements, we re-interpret God's word in the First Nation's view. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit, and that testifies for God. Therefore, that truth gives us motivation and power.

I also have a personal interest in ecology. When theology responds to ecology, we call it eco-theology. The First Nation's story and philosophy are good sources of eco-theology in that eco-theology pursues humility to God and nature and a harmonious attitude to others and nature. Whenever I have a chance to unfold it, I'd love to dig deeper, but today, let me finalize with a quotation from Rev. John R. Thompson of the National Indigenous Council in Canadian Union of Public Employees. He says,

We do not own ourselves; we do not own anything. We are the Lord's, as is all of Creation. We have a borrowed life on borrowed time—let us make the best of it. We are gifted from Creator for one another; all of life is interconnected, and we need each other.¹

Let the truth and wisdom of the Holy Spirit live lively in you.

Let us pray: O God, lead us into the realm of truth and wisdom. Whenever we re-interpret your word, O God, pour your Spirit in us that confuses us, stirs us, transforms us, and creates your power. Holy Sacred Spirit, breathe your breath on us; Holy Sacred Spirit, breathe your life in us. Amen.

¹ <https://united-church.ca/blogs/round-table/earth-lords>; access as of June 25, 2022.