

Sermon for 2017 Yr A Easter 6 (Creation)
Preached Sunday 5/21/2017 at St. James', Mount Vernon
By the Rev. Charles F. Brock

When the European explorers crossed the Atlantic to the American continents, they found them already settled by native peoples.

These peoples had their own way of life very different from the European way.

Because they did not look and act and believe like Europeans, because they did not understand property and possession like Europeans, they were treated as inferiors and heathens, sometimes not much more than animals, and their lands were simply taken from them.

The sad story of how the European occupation of the Americas displaced and devastated the native peoples is well known.

But we who live where those native peoples once made their homes have begun to understand and appreciate the values of the life that they lived here.

We are recognizing the great sensitivity of native spirituality, a sensibility that speaks to our own condition and our need to be in a more wholesome relationship with God's creation.

The native peoples didn't have a faith and religion as we understand them.

Their spiritual life was so deeply woven into the fabric of their daily life, that they lived and knew their faith in an almost pre-conscious way. They didn't have creedal statements of faith... they had a living relationship with creation, and a deep sense of unity with all of creation under the great creator.

For these people, Creation was of a piece with the Creator. The native peoples treated the land, the rivers, the deer and the eagle, the mysteries of life and death, with the same regard that they had for the Creator who had made them all.

We are heirs of the European tradition of Western thought, shaped by centuries of the Greek and Enlightenment worldview. And so we do not natively experience creation in a unitive way, like the native peoples. Rather, we think of and experience the world in a dualistic way, a world of subjects and objects, the observer separate from the observed.

This dualistic worldview has woven itself into our religious life. We generally think of God as apart and separate from us, creation as something that that God made but stands apart from, and each of us as discrete separate beings, separate from God, separate from one another, separate from the created world in which we live.

But Christianity affirms that God made himself incarnate in the world by being born in the person of Jesus Christ, and by so doing God affirmed the goodness of his creation, and united himself to his creation, so that we can never be apart from him. Indeed, the experience of separation from God is at the heart of the brokenness of sin.

If God is incarnate, embodied in his creation, then we are in error when we treat creation as anything other than the manifestation of God's own being. In the words of St. Francis', we should speak to creation in familiar, familial terms: Brother Sun, Sister Moon. We are intimate with all creation through our Father and Creator, as made known to us through our Savior and Redeemer.

In this way, our Christian faith is not that different then from the spirituality of the native peoples. God calls us to stewardship—responsible care of God's creation—not as lords over and above it but as loving family, part of and immersed within it.

The spirituality of the native peoples is an icon of how to live in the unity that Jesus came to teach us. As we use prayers of the native people in our service today, we also honor those who lived here before us, and who still have much to teach us about following the Way that Jesus showed us.

Amen.