

Sermon Title: **“Paul, Peter, and Native American Ministries Sunday”**

Bible: **Acts 9:1-9 & John 21:15-19**

When: on the Third Sunday of Easter, May 1st, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube live streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight,
O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Native American Ministries Sunday Greeting

I would like to start my message with a Native American Ministries Sunday Greeting. This is from the United Methodist Book of Worship, inspired by the oration of Chief Seattle, a 19th century Native American leader.. I will speak the part of One, and you can speak the part of Many.

One: Every part of this earth is sacred.

Many: Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy.

The rocky crest, the meadow, the beasts and all the people, all belong to the same family. Teach your children that the earth is our mother.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. We are part of the earth, and the earth is a part of us.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst.

The perfumed flowers are our sisters, the air is precious, for all of us share the same breath.

The wind that gave our grandparents breath also receives their last sigh.

The wind gave our children the spirit of life.

This we know, the earth does not belong to us.

We belong to the earth.

This we know, all things are connected.

Like the blood which unites one family, all things are connected.

Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all.

For 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.

Let us give thanks for the web and the circle that connects us. Thanks be to God, the God of all.**2. Native American Ministries Sunday**

Since 1989, many United Methodist congregations have observed the third Sunday after Easter as Native American Ministries Sunday. The purpose is to support leadership development and ministries by and with, and education of Native Americans in our denomination. In the United Methodist Church, we have six Special Sundays with an offering, and Native American Ministries Sunday is one of them. Even if our church “officially” does not collect an offering for Native American Ministries, I hope for us to at least remember this third Sunday of Easter as Native American Ministries Sunday. If anyone wants to give towards Native American Ministries, please write "Native American" on the memo line. Then, our church finance team will send it to Native American Ministries.

I would like to share a flyer from GCORR, the General Commission on Religion and Race. Did you know that native and indigenous people are defined as a protected category of people, many times because they have been subject to generations of repression, demonization of their cultures and languages, and systemic racism? There are 7.1 million

people who identify as being of American Indian or Alaska Native descent, and 574 tribes are federally recognized. Out of 30,543 UMC congregations in the USA, 157 are Native American. Is there anyone who has a Native American background? Do you have any friends who are Native American or have a Native American heritage? Last year, thankfully, our congregation had a guest speaker for this Native American Ministries Sunday. This year, I would like to share my own experience and some moments of our Cal-NeV Annual Conference.

3. My Experience at the Walker River Paiute Tribe Reservation

When I was an intern of San Rafael First UMC in 2014, I went to the Walker River Paiute Tribe Reservation in Nevada, as an adult counselor with youth for the Sierra Service Project, SSP Walker River. The Sierra Service Project provides Youth Camps, and they are focusing on repairing or improving homes in rural areas. After a long drive to Walker River, we built wheelchair ramps, while staying and sleeping at the gym. A United Methodist Church is located there. We used their church kitchen to cook and eat together. This one-week Sierra Service Project is very short and superficial, but I can say that it is the beginning of my own experience. Recently, I found out that the church where I cooked and ate is Schurz UMC, which is one of three Native American churches in our Cal-NeV Annual Conference. This year, the Cal-NeV Annual Conference made a short video for these three Native American Churches. (Video Link - https://youtu.be/f_O1QJ-Z2NI)

4. The 2016 Service Act of Repentance for the Horrific Acts Against Native Americans

There was a moment that made me think of Native Americans more deeply. I attended the 2016 Cal-Nev Annual Conference Session. There was a Service Act of Repentance for the horrific acts against Native Americans. The speaker was a Native American United Methodist pastor. I cannot remember his name, but I still remember what he said. This is not it exactly, but the gist of what he said was that he was thankful that this act of repentance was not just lip service. I was surprised to hear that. I am thankful, and I cannot forget it. As an immigrant to this land, and as a connectional church, not only region-wise, but also timewise, I hope for us to share the responsibility in the process of decolonizing our minds, and the process of healing and reconciliation.

5. A 2021 Resolution on Supporting Native American Ministries

At last year's Cal-Nev Annual Conference Session, there was a resolution on supporting Native American Ministries in search of truth, justice, and reconciliation. It is to renew our commitment to the process of healing relationships with indigenous persons expressed through the 2016 Service of Act of Repentance. This resolution was made because of the Indian Boarding School policies designed to erase the language, culture, and spiritual practices of Native peoples. It sounds like not only the government but also our churches were involved in these boarding school policies. It led us to a long discussion. Even lunch time could not stop us from discussing, because this issue was very complicated, and very important. I feel that our act of repentance, healing, and reconciliation is not just lip service. And what I loved seeing is that this resolution was made by CONAM, the Committee on

Native American Ministries. And whenever there was an amendment, there was an opportunity to listen to the CONAM chair and members. “No decisions about us without us” was honored there. Their voices were there, and their voices were heard.

6. Paul and Peter, and Native American Ministries Sunday

Today’s Scripture Readings are about the two famous Apostles, Paul and Peter. The first reading is about Paul, when Paul was Saul, and he persecuted Christians in the name of God. There is a saying, “They gave us the Bible, and they took our land.” In the time of colonization, in the name of God, our faith ancestors took others’ lands. They might have given them the Bible, but we cannot deny that they took others’ lands. It is not easy to admit this sin. But as we read Saul’s story in the Bible, we need to face it. I love the Bible, because it has a painful, shameful, and undeniable story in it. Paul used to be the enemy of the early Christians. The apostle Paul wrote many letters to the churches, but Paul did not erase this past sinful time in his life. How about us? When we, the church, did injustice and harmed others, including this land and its people, do we want to ignore it or erase it? Don’t we have the tears in our minds and the responsibility to confess our church’s sin? Don’t we want healing and reconciliation?

The second reading is about Peter, when the resurrected Jesus met him. When Jesus was arrested before the crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus, not once, but three times. Peter’s denials three times are written in the Bible: “I do not know him.” “I am not one of his followers.” “I do not know what you are talking about.” After Jesus was risen, Jesus came to Peter, and ate

together with him. And today's second reading started. Jesus asked Peter three times. "Do you love me?" I thought that Jesus might have asked Peter, "How dare you? Did you deny me three times?" But what Jesus said was, "Do you love me?" What is our answer? All of us cannot free ourselves from our past, which was good or bad, right or wrong. When Jesus asks us, "Do you love me?" What is our answer? I love Jesus. We love Jesus. Then, we can start again. When we love Jesus, we will face our past. When we love Jesus, we can confess our sin. When we love Jesus, we are in the process of healing and reconciliation. Just like Jesus came to Paul and Peter, our resurrected Jesus Christ came to us and lives in us, with us, and among us. Then, we are the people of healing, reconciliation, and a new beginning.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, have mercy on us. Please lead us to your mercy and grace. Please guide us to confess our sin against Native Americans. Please pour out your healing and reconciliation upon us. In Jesus' name. Amen.