

Sermon Title: “**Native American Ministries Sunday**”

Bible: **Acts 2:14a, 36-41**

When: on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 23rd, 2023

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

Opening Prayer

May the warm winds of heaven blow softly on our house and on our church. May the Great Spirit bless all who enter here. 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

Today is the Third Sunday of Easter! And it is Native American Ministries Sunday in the United Methodist Church, one of the six Special Sundays. Special Sundays mean that the United Methodist Church supports particular designated ministries not only with our prayers, but also with our giving. There are many different ministries, but we cannot support every ministry. According to our ability and our context, we can do what God has called us to do. Even if our church does not set aside today as Native American Ministries Sunday, I hope for us at least to remember our Native American Ministries Sunday on the third Sunday of Easter, and at least to learn about Native People a little bit more. It is just one Sunday out of fifty-two Sundays, and it is just one hour out of the year, which has 8760 hours.

But as we read today’s scripture reading, it could be a moment of repentance. In acts of repentance, we find forgiveness, the blessing of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through our acts of repentance, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can move to a place of healing. As we receive the promise of the resurrection and the new life, God offers the promise of healing and restoration. If you want to give this Native American Ministries

Sunday, you can write a memo of “Native American” on your offering. Then, the church can send 100% of our collected offering.

You might think, “Wait, Hwapyoung, I wasn’t even there at that time, when Jesus was on the cross. It does not apply to me. Wait, Hwapyoung, I wasn’t even there at that time when Native Americans were in pain, in the darkness and death. This Native American Ministries Sunday does not apply to me.” As you see, I am a Korean. What made this Korean United Methodist Pastor prepare this message? That’s because our ancestors, and our faith ancestors, and our Native siblings are not “them,” but us. I know how the power of evil flourishes in a corrupted system. I know that we are all the body of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

2. Our Sad Histories

Recently, I learned that our Methodists recognize the complicity in genocide and trauma. Very sadly, the Sand Creek Massacre was led by a Methodist pastor in 1863. The attack destroyed a village and slaughtered 230 people, two-thirds of whom were women, children, and the elderly. Boarding schools, including those run by Methodists in the US, inflicted trauma on Native American Children. There were the atrocities associated with tribal children once taken from their families and placed in boarding schools. Some of the Indian boarding schools were established by Methodists. Lord, have mercy! What should we do? I do not want to turn away from the epidemic of missing and murdered Native women and

girls. I do not want to participate in the crucifixion of God's people when we fail to repair the harm against our Native siblings. I want to go to a place of repentance. That's because through the acts of repentance, there is forgiveness, God's healing, and God's promise of restoration.

3. "11 Facts About Native People in the Society and the Church"

Through God's grace, through the power of the Holy Spirit, I hope for us to take one more step. In November 2022, the Rev. David Wilson was elected to become the first Native American bishop in the history of The United Methodist Church. I brought "11 Facts about Native People in the Society and the Church" by Bishop David Wilson. Among the eleven facts, I will share three.

7. *Native Americans as United Methodist leaders date back to the early 19th century.* The first Native American District Superintendent in the denomination was the Rev. Samuel Checote, a Muscogee, who was appointed in 1868 after he was relocated to Indian Territory in the 1820s. In 1992, the Rev. Dr. Lois Neal, a Cherokee, became the first Native American woman appointed District Superintendent. Rev. Dr. Neal and the Rev. Everline "Tweedy" Sombrero, a Navajo, were the first two Native American women to earn a master's degree in theology in 1988. The Rev. Dr. Thom White Wolf Fassett, a Seneca, was the first Native American to be named General Secretary of a church-wide agency of the United Methodist Church. Dr. Fassett was elected and served in that position with the General Board of Church

and Society from 1988 to 2000. In 2022, Rev. David Wilson, a member of the Choctaw Nation, was the first Native American elected as bishop.

9. *Indigenous persons play a vital and important role in the life of The United Methodist Church.* Even so, they represent the smallest racial ethnic group in the denomination, at 0.47 percent. According to the latest study of the United Methodist Native American Comprehensive Plan and Path One (a church-planting initiative of Discipleship Ministries), there are 157 Native American United Methodist congregations in the United States. The largest concentration of Native churches is in the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, which comprises parishes in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas.

11. *Indigenous persons are the only racial-ethnic group that must constantly “prove” who we are.* To gain U.S. federal-government recognition and protection, Native Americans must document their racial identity. This federal recognition began with the Dawes Commission in 1887, which required every Native American person in the country to register. Tribal peoples from federally recognized tribes must register with their tribes to show their lineage to these tribes. Each tribe issues tribal cards and the government issues a Certificate Degree of Indian Blood card to individuals. The cards are often used by tribal nations to prove eligibility for government services.

As I made some copies of this list, you can read and learn about the others.

4. “Native American Awareness Sunday” Prayer from the UM Book of Worship

I hope that as we learn about this, we can have our Native siblings as part of our body of Jesus Christ. Our Cal-Nev Annual Conference has three Native American United Methodist churches. Let us watch a short video. Let us close with the prayer for “Native American Awareness Sunday” from the UM Book of worship.

Every part of this earth is sacred.

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. Amen.