

**The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton, Shackan First Nation; Sermon on October 19, 2024  
Anglican Diocese of Adelaide**

My earliest memories include lessons about the intrinsic value of nature. My mother instilled in me, that every animal, plant, tree, insect, lake and stream, mountain, desert, the oceans, star and moon, and the Earth itself has value - not because humans ascribed value to them but because *to be* in existence is to belong to something much bigger than the self. The nature of the Sacred whole, she said, is relational and is intimately interconnected and interdependent. The resulting woven whole is Sacred – worthy in its unique being, special for never having been before until it came to be, and having a sacred journey and purpose of its own that deserves respect and encouragement. We people, she said, must care for all that is, because only through our understanding and compassion, will Creation continue to be strong enough to provide for us.

As I grew and went to preschool and then grade school, I lived and studied in dominant culture settings of education in the United States. It wasn't until I was well into my college years that I realized that I was bi-cultural, that I was culturally fluent in two different and often competing worldviews – that of the Shackan First Nation and that of the dominant culture that circumscribed my world as an urban Native, an Indigenous person not living on heritage reserve lands. My father was the descendent of English Protestants who having arrived in 1629 were among the first Europeans to cross the Atlantic Ocean to settle in the English colonies then being established on the shores of what would become America.

Family heritage was important to both my mother and my father. Each had inherited genealogy books from relatives. I loved to listen to the stories they told about the relatives of once upon a time (as well as gossip about ones who were very much alive). My mother died when I was in my 20's, and I remember a moment when I was talking with my father afterwards and describing some of the research I had been doing on the Indigenous side of my heritage. I had been excitedly sharing with him some of what I was learning when my father became suddenly quiet. After a few moments, I noticed this and paused with a questioning look. With a somber tone in his voice, he gently asked me, "Aren't you proud of my side of the family?"

What a question, a question that I have spent a lifetime reconciling. Because of what I have had to reconcile within my own identity, I have often served as a bridge builder within the Episcopal Church in my diocese and in our international governance structure as our institution struggles with its colonial identity and longs for a renewed future that it does not yet know how to create. My father's ancestors lived, prospered, and gained privileges through the conqueror's side of the historical forces of colonialism known today as the Doctrine of Discovery. The Papal Bulls of the 15th and 16th centuries empowered European powers to conquer the lands of non-Christians. The papacy created the template for the Protestant English and the Church of England for weaponizing Christianity to benefit the settlers and in the process destroy the New Eden they sought. From the early colonies through the Revolutionary War, from Westward Expansion to the Continentalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the United States was divinely sanctioned by theology in which nature was deemed as soulless along with those peoples who lived within it. The cultural cosmology of the Christianity of Empire placed white, patriarchal Western Civilization at the top of a hierarchical structure of social, ecclesial, and theological ontology. Indigenous people were just another resource divinely gifted for exclusive use by Christian nations to exploit, convert, enslave, and conquer.

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Christian colonialism in the Americas perpetrated genocide of Indigenous peoples through several means; through the destruction of environmental habitats and animal populations; through military occupation; through the introduction of rapidly spreading diseases (that killed 90% of the estimated 80 million Indigenous peoples before the English founded the colony at Jamestown in 1607); through forced migration from traditional lands; through the removal of children to government and church run boarding schools; through the prohibition of traditional Indigenous lifeways; and through assimilation into Western culture without being granted the rights of citizenship.

As the eldest daughter of an eldest daughter, I understood from my mother without being told that I had inherited the blessing and the burden of the expectations of leadership within the matriarchal tradition and stories of the family ancestors of my Shackan'ee heritage. My leadership formation began with those first lessons about the sacredness of Creation, serving as the foundation for assuming responsibility for the wellbeing of Indigenous people and my community, for being a healing force and living medicine for communal healing, and supporting every person and being to live fully into reaching their fullest potential of what Creator had made in them to be. Only by cultivating individuals can the community thrive.

As the child of a scientist, I learned from my father to be a critical thinker, to have the courage to advocate for the marginalized, to explore new ideas and develop new understandings. He viewed the world through a lens of humanitarian ethics and scientific study. He appreciated the innovative creativity of his immigrant ancestors, their resilience and independence, their pursuit of knowledge and art, their courage in the face of foes both in war and in intellectual debate. I learned by the age of five that if I was going to argue my point at the dinner table, I had better know what I was talking about. My friends, when I tell you that our world can no longer sustain and suffer an old-world Christianity, with its empire, white supremacy, and monolithic nationalism, I know what I am talking about from both sides of the equation – the conqueror and the conquered.

It has been my professional experience in working with individuals recovering from trauma and communities recovering from intergenerational trauma that the old-world Christianity of empire is incapable of healing the world that it tore asunder; it continues to teach from the story of being dispossessed from Eden when actually Western Civilization through the roots of its Judeo-Christian thought disposed of Eden. Our earth and all humanity is in of healing and a new relationship. I believe that the time has come to Indigenize Christianity by reuniting it - in peace - with the tradition of Western Civilization that currently that has developed its own Indigenous understanding of the interdependence of all that is, the kinship humanity has with the Earth and the cosmos, and responded with the expression of awe for which the human spirit hungers. This is to say, Christianity must listen to the story of the Sacred that is being spoken today through science, which is the social institution in Western Civilization that currently holds and expresses the ongoing witness and message of *resurrection*. The spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples and Western science have come to the same conclusion – the former based in tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of years of oral tradition and the latter based in the last 700 years of development in Western Civilization.

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Brian Swimme is Director of the Center for the Story of the Universe and a professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. He cites the emergence of a new consciousness in Western cultural cosmology as science has begun to understand the tremendous impact human beings have on the environment. Scientific discoveries about the structures, forces, and energies of the universe have caused many scientists to pause in awe at the dynamics of a universe that expanded from a single point of energetic emergence and, like a seed, contained everything needed to become what it is and to evolve consciousness. He writes, "We realize that when we are speculating on the nature of the universe, we are literally the universe reflecting upon itself. Our existence is something that was built into the universe from the very, very beginning. Each of us is a cosmological construction that took 14 billion years to become. There is no ontological difference between ourselves and the universe. We are a further development of the universe. The human mind is a novel emergence equivalent to a geological era, We've become a planetary power without realizing our impact until recently. It will take 10 million years to achieve the level of diversity that was present a century ago. It's easy to become discouraged. But the universe gets itself into situations that seem so bleak on a regular basis – yet the next step is enabled into a new phase of creativity."

Steven Charleston is an Episcopal Bishop, a citizen of the Choctaw Nation, and a Native American elder. Now retired, he served as the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska from 1991 to 1996, and dean of Episcopal Divinity School, from 1999 to 2008. Of his Indigenous spiritual tradition, he reflects, "We acknowledged the sacred kinship of all creatures. All living things have a spirit within them, the handprint of the Potter who shaped them from clay and breathed the breath of life into them as they lay sleeping. Therefore, we have many elders whose wisdom can help us – and not all of those are human." In another reflection, he adds, "For decades now we have been staring at the scientific reports. They have not sufficiently inspired us to change our apocalyptic reality. [As spiritual leaders and people of faith] we must help humanity rediscover [Mother Earth], their loving parent, the living world that sustains them. We must help them feel her love just as we show them how that love can be returned."

Thomas Berry (November 9, 1914 – June 1, 2009) was an American theologian and Catholic priest, cultural historian, and scholar of the world's religions. In his work as an advocate for environmental justice, he referred to himself as a "Geologist". Early in his studies, he noted, "The environmental crisis is fundamentally a spiritual crisis." In the 1970's, he felt called to respond to the growing ecological and climate crisis and proposed the need for a "New Story" of evolution suggesting that a deep understanding of the history and functioning of the evolving universe is a necessary inspiration and guide for our own effective functioning as individuals and as a species.

He felt that we were at a critical turning point, moving out of the Cenozoic era and entering into a new evolutionary phase, which would either be an Ecozoic Era, characterized by mutually-enhancing human-Earth relations, or a Techozoic Era, where we dominate and exploit the planet via our technological mastery. Berry said the transformation of humanity's priorities will not come easily. It requires what he called "the great work"—the title of one of his books—in four institutional realms: the political and legal order; the economic and industrial world; education; and religion. For my own part, I believe that spiritual teaching can help guide and

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support the development of technology that supports sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships within Creation.

Berry was influenced by the work of the Jesuit scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and he served as president of the American Teilhard Association (1975–1987). Berry took Teilhard's major ideas on evolution and expanded them into an epic story to which humanity belongs. To that end, with the physical cosmologist Brian Swimme, he wrote *The Universe Story* (1992). This was the first time the history of Western Civilizations study of evolution was told as a story in which humans have a critical role and responsibility, not just a seat at the top of an ideological pyramid.

When I hear in Gospel of Mark how James and John approach Jesus with their request to sit in the seats of honor at his right and left when he “comes into his glory,” I hear the influence of the Roman empire that Jesus is asking his disciples not to reinvent but to live from a new story and a new way of being in relationship with God, with one another, and with Creation. Jesus concisely describes the nature of empire when he says to his friends, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” In his teaching about the nature of the new community, I hear the response of an Indigenous Jesus, a spiritual leader who comprehends the Sacred nature of being held in existence and to not live for one’s self interest. It is likely that the Galilean people recognized in his description how Rome operated. For Jesus’ followers – as with every generation living under the colonizing effects of Empire there is the temptation to imitate them, to continue in ways that harm because they are familiar and navigable for personal success. Some accounts from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolution show that there was a lively debate among the Hebrew people on whether to imitate the Greek educational, athletic, artistic, and militaristic activities or to maintain their own unique culture as an expression of their faith. In short, how much should they assimilate just to survive?

Jesus refuses assimilation into the Roman culture of empire and violence, war and domination. He is not a colonizer. Jesus rejects the narrow religious teaching of the Sadducees and Scribes for whom the Law as the covenant with God had become as an idol in itself and was weaponized through interpretation to oppress the people, marginalize the poor and ill, and justify hatred and violence against Samaritans whom they perceived to NOT be among the chosen. Jesus confronts the prejudices and religious class structures of his own tradition that classify people into hierarchical categories of separation that would use their faith tradition as justification for prejudice, racism, and oppression of others rather than loving one’s neighbor..

Psyche - In the KJV, it is translated 58 times as "soul," 40 times as "life", and three times as "mind." There are some Greek words that cannot be easily translated into a single English word, but psyche is not one of them. The way Jesus uses psyche is the concept of "self," in the sense of our “conscious self.” Our word “psychology” actually comes from this word. This self is the center of our experiences and the source of all our memories. This “self” is a connection point of our mind, our emotions, our body, and our spirits. This “self” is our awareness that we have a heart, mind, body, spirit, and the temporary and precious life of the flesh. This is the

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self that eats and drinks and wants to, as evinced in Jesus' table ministry. This is the self that remembers eating and drinking and remembers that it has all types of needs and obligations. This is the self that God values in every being. This is the life that worries, because it contains a mind and a heart. This is the life that loves, that cultivates other lives, that encourages and weeps and laughs and hopes. This is a personal life, the life of identity, being this specific person at this specific point in time, at this specific location. In this life, the entirety of all that is has found unique expression. Reflective of the nature of the universe as a continuing dynamic of unfolding, the power of Christ's resurrection was not a one-time moment of the past but an ongoing force of renewal in which we are to participate in our time and place and unique unfolding lifetime of relationships.

In Mark 10:45, Jesus says this about himself: "For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life/soul/his totality in reciprocity for many unique lives/souls/totalities." That is to say, Jesus is willing to lose his ψυχήν (psyche) in order to rescue others. I think this points to the courage that discipleship requires – it is not a safe way of neglecting the needs of others in order to preserve one's own soul. In fact, the paradox of faith, stated so well in Mark 8:35 but often forgotten with the focus on Mark 8:36 is that it is in losing our own ψυχήν (psyche) that we preserve it because we are part of a much greater universe.