

Give Thanks to Creator God Who Gives Us Life

I have to admit that I tend to look at the world through the lens of food – the food that is consumed and how it is prepared, both in history and today.

Given that Jesus ate dinner with everyone whether they were hated or loved by the community; Jesus transformed water into wine for a wedding banquet and spent the last night before his arrest at dinner with those closest to him; I think I have some good company.

I belong to a group of women who gathers once a month to prepare themed dinners. The hostess chooses the theme, and the rest of the group are each assigned a specific course to prepare.

A little while ago, the theme was Haida Gwaii and I was responsible for the vegetable dish. If you are not familiar with it, Haida Gwaii is an archipelago on the north coast of British Columbia; previously known as the Queen Charlotte Islands. It is an area of rugged beaches, ancient rainforest and powerful weather.

Haida Gwaii is primarily inhabited by members of the First Nations. Thinking about the vegetable dish I had to prepare, I immediately thought of the Three Sisters. The Three Sisters are the main agricultural crop of many First Nations across the Americas, across Turtle Island. The Three Sisters are corn, beans and squash, they grow particularly well together and the combination is very nutritious. The combination is well known among the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and Chonnonton people, who are the local First Peoples.

As I did a little research for my dinner, I learned that the food of Haida is quite different. They are primarily gatherers rather than farmers, and they hunt for fish and other sea animals. Their diet consists of lots of fish, berries, seaweed, mushrooms, leafy greens, sea asparagus and spruce tips.

Whether it is the Haudenosaunee or the Anishinaabe from around here, or the Haida and Tlingit from the Pacific coast, one of the things that I have noticed that they have in common is that when they harvest their fruit and vegetables, they give thanks to the Creator.

It is the same whether they are gathering just enough for a snack or for a meal that day or enough to preserve for the winter. It is the same when they harvest a tree to make a canoe or a long house. They will thank the plant or animal for giving its life or even part of themselves if berries are plucked from a bush.

They might make an offering of tobacco or another sacred herb if a more significant harvest is to be taken.

Always giving thanks to the plant or animal for giving what they have so that the person will live. Giving thanks to the Creator.

Isaiah is giving thanks for the true God who made everything, who was and is the creator in the first reading.

As Isaiah says, the Creator is the one who put us into this land, a good land, that feeds and clothes and houses us.

It is God who created all, who connects all to all, who connects us to the land, to the plants, to the animals, the birds, the creatures, to other humans, and connects us to God.

Isaiah reminds us that it was God who gave life in the beginning, and who gives life today.

This is the same God who put us in this wonderful land. This is the same God who connects us to all of creation.

There is much to be thankful for.

David, in Psalm 19, gives thanks for the glory of God in all of creation, starting with the sun as it travels across the heavens day by day; to the drippings of honey from the honeycomb.

There are 634 recognized First Nations governments or bands in Canada, representing over 50 distinct Nations and languages. Their culture and traditions vary across Turtle Island. The Longhouse, in different designs is found in many areas but totem poles are only found across most of the First Nations of the Pacific Northwest Coast but not found here in the lands of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and Chonnonton peoples. The traditional foods are diverse, and much would be unrecognizable from one area to another, except perhaps the hunting of deer which seems to be found in many places.

They are all very aware of their immediate environment and give thanks for anything and everything that they use that supports their life.

The Rev Dr Ray Aldred, teaches at the Vancouver School of Theology, is status Cree from Swan River Band, Treaty 8. He was born in Northern Alberta, and now resides with his wife in Richmond, British Columbia. Speaking about the National Indigenous Day of Prayer, Ray notes that it is a good world, provided by a good creator through which we are connected to all. He adds that the teachings of his ancestors and the teaching of Jesus are aligned, encouraging all to learn how to live in harmony – with God, with people and with all of creation. Ray encourages everyone to begin their day with thanksgiving.

We come together as a church across the country today the longest day of the year and the summer solstice, a sacred day for many aboriginal peoples. On this National Indigenous Day of Prayer, we recognize the contributions of all Indigenous Peoples to Canada. We gather in worship and prayer to honour Indigenous Peoples, celebrate the Creator's gifts and recommit to the shared work of healing, right relationship and renewed life in Christ.

Thanks be to God for the gift of life in this beautiful world. Amen.

Readings: Isaiah 40:25-31
John 1:1-18
Psalm 19