

Sermon June 21, 2020 Galatians 3:28 Aboriginal Sunday
Reverend Nancy Best

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Thank you for inviting me to share the message for Aboriginal Sunday. I'd like to begin by sharing some information about my heritage. My grandmother was born on what used to be called Cagnawagna Reserve. It is now Kanasataki. It is located on the border of Quebec, Ontario, and Northern New York State. We are Mohawk heritage. My grandmother grew up on the reserve. Her brothers Mike and Frank fought in the second WW but in doing so they no longer fit the residency requirements and they lost their status and homes on the reserve. My grandmother, who was Roman Catholic met my grandfather, who was Irish and Protestant. She lost her status and got kicked off the reserve when she took up with my grandfather. Because it was a "mixed relationship," they could not find a church that would marry them. That actually took several years before a law clerk at the courthouse in Perth would do so.

After my grandfather died, my grandmother raised my Mom and her sister Rose in Smiths Falls. They had a baby brother who died as an infant. I was raised in Perth. We were very poor money wise, but I had a happy childhood. My mother tried to raise us as white, and for the most part, it worked. The exception was my brother Bill who was several shades darker than I am and was immediately identifiable as Indigenous. That did not go well for him, as some of my worst memories of my childhood were hearing boys from school yelling "Let's put the boots to the Indian," and the thuds and beatings that would continue as I ran home to get my

Mom to make them stop. I grew up without a huge amount of time spent with my extended family. I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. I thought she was the most superstitious person I had ever met, with her telling me what to plant in her garden, what plants were friends, and which ones would not grow well if they were put side by side. She had rules for everything from when to plant to what to do when my twins didn't want to sleep at night, but sleep all day and be up all night. She said it was because they were mixed up in the womb, as one was breech and the other transverse. She told me to somersault them and in my sleepless desperation I did so, and got the first night of good sleep since they were born. As I grew older, I understood that what I thought were superstitions were her teachings.

I wish I had been able to spend time on the reserve and get to know my great aunts and other family. I used to see my cousin when he visited the small town in Eastern Ontario to paint their water towers, and Mohawks are known for their ability to be comfortable at great heights, and built many of the skyscrapers in New York City. When my grandmother died I was shocked at the number of people in their beautiful regalia who showed up for the funeral, including a chief in his floor length bonnet of eagle feathers. I felt I had been robbed of my heritage.

Paul, in his letter to churches in southern Galatia wrote in Galatians 3:28 "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This wonderful proclamation of inclusivity needs to be heard. This statement rings true for us, here today. In these times of racial awareness and acknowledgement of discrimination, it is time for us to focus on our common humanity and look for ways we can love our neighbours instead of fearing them, or talking about **us** and **them**. We need to honour the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet and George Floyd. As someone who has handled racism, yes, even from church people, it is our responsibility to teach our

children and grandchildren and our Sunday School children that we are all one, united in our love and faithfulness as followers of the teachings of Christ. Very likely one of the phrases the people at Queenswood have heard me saying most often is that we are all our Creator's beloved children.

Aboriginal people have a saying: All My Relations. What this says to me is that we are all united. It goes further than Paul's teaching and evangelism. Paul was speaking about people. All my relations include all living things. People, creatures in the water, those that fly in the air, everything that creeps, and crawls and slithers on the ground. We all have a place in God's great creation. I was taught it is like Creation is a giant spider's web. If you pluck at one thread, the vibrations are felt throughout the whole web. It's like the ripples that spread out when a pebble is thrown or skipped in water. I believe that the pandemic has shown the truth of this. As people have been forced to stay put, pollution is not as widespread. Places that have not seen clear skies in decades can now see to the mountains in the horizon. Native species are returning to cleaner habitats. I can't imagine fish in the canals of Venice, or mountain goats in the streets of a village in Wales! Even though the humpback whale in the St. Lawrence River came to a sad demise, I am astounded that it ended up there in the first place.

So, today on Aboriginal Sunday, let us give thanks for the contributions of our First Nations people. Let us all, individually and collectively seek out ways to work for reconciliation and justice. Let us be the beloved children of God, and love our neighbours, yes all of them. Like the old Sunday School hymn says, Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Reverend Nancy Best