

# OPENING WORSHIP SERMON

## The Rev. Canon Martin Brokenleg, OSBCn

Mitákuyepi, Ĥtayétu kin le, Čhaŋté waštaya napečiyúzapelo. Šičaŋǵu Lakǵóta miyéyelo. Waŋblí Wakíta emáčiyapelo. Haída emáčiyapi “Skíl Gyaants,” na Kaŋǵi Tháŋka Tipi miyéyelo.

Relatives and kinsfolk, with a good heart I shake your hand. I was born among the Šičaŋǵu Lakǵóta but I have been adopted by the Raven House of the Haida people at Masset. My Haida name is Skil Gyaants. As we continue to restore our original Indigenous ways, we recover some of our traditional protocols: always beginning with our own God-given languages and observances such as acknowledging the territories we gather on. So I want to raise my hands in gratitude to the Lekwungin People and to their ancestors for maintaining their responsibility of living well in this coastal place as God had intended them to live.

This is the feast of St. Michael and All Angels. Rather than think about the war in heaven, or the angelic wrestling match, and all the blessed heavenly spirits ascending and descending, I want to think this evening about the work we Anglicans have on earth as we engage in the work of coming together as Indigenous and Introduced people in North America. The work of reconciliation in Canada is unique to us Canadians. No one else in the world is engaged in this effort in the

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way we are. None of us have a guidebook about how to do this work and so we must trust in God to guide us as we all stumble along.

As you know, one major progression in reconciliation within the Anglican Church of Canada is the movement toward an Indigenous Anglican Church. A vote on this development is due at the General Synod next summer and so we must think about an Indigenous Anglican Church. What is it? How can we begin to think about it?

This Indigenous Anglican church is a departure from an old way of being Anglican and setting out on a journey to a new way, a self-determined way of being Anglican. In a way, Indigenous Anglicans are at the same place where the Jewish elder Abraham was. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did [his son] and [his grandson], who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:8-10). So what are we to think as Indigenous Anglicans continue on our journey to our city, our self-determined church, founded and built by God?

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In Indigenous traditions, we always begin with the wisdom of our ancestors. The traditional ways of our ancestors are our Old Testament. What we call the Old Testament in the Bible is the written record of God's actions and teachings for the Jewish people. In those same centuries, God was not silent in North America. God also spoke here on Turtle Island, on North America, to our ancestors. Their oral teachings and traditional ceremonies are not pagan, nor old fashioned, nor demonic. They are the actions and teachings, from God, for our ancestors and so we treat them with the same dignity and respect we would have for anything from God. God gave songs, prayers, ceremonies, and stories to our ancestors and to us and we always turn to them first, especially if we are going to be able to hear clearly the teachings of Jesus. We listen to the wisdom of our ancestors since God gives them to us, their descendants. These Indigenous teachings will be a guide as The Indigenous Anglican church continues to emerge.

### **Resistance to Change**

Resistance is a natural part of any change. It is the "push back" whenever something is moving, as when air pushes back against a waving hand. Psychological resistance pushes back even if we want a change to take place. Talk to anyone who has ever been on a diet, for

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example. Even if I want that change to happen, something in me still wants a doughnut. This is resistance and we will see it in ourselves. Remember when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of Egypt to freedom and their own country? They complained that the food was not good and they wanted to go back even if it was back to slavery. Expect resistance to the idea and the practice of an Indigenous Anglican Church and move through it.

### **The Legacy of Trauma**

History has given every Indigenous person some personal level of trauma. Whether we went to residential school or it was our parents or grandparents, we are carrying the wounds of trauma. I carry the wounds of trauma. Inside I am no different from the drunks down on Pandora Street. Every indigenous person is carrying some level of trauma. You only have to grow up around other Indigenous people to pick up trauma, but it also comes from abuse, racism, and cultural denial, experiences Indigenous people have all had. Trauma is even transferred to us genetically. Some of us have done a great deal of healing work and some of us are only beginning.

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### Where Are We Going

So where are we going in this Indigenous Anglican Church? In a way we are going nowhere and in another, we are going far away from where we have been.

We are going nowhere in the sense that we are not leaving the Anglican Church of Canada. This is still our church. Some of us will continue to be active in our dioceses and parishes just as we were before. Others of us will find other forms of association and working together that will be new.

I grew up in the Episcopalian diocese of South Dakota where most of the church members are from the Lakota Nation. Eighty-five percent of the communicants of that diocese are Indigenous people. We actually have only a few White people in some of our congregations. In that diocese, we have a non-geographic deanery called the Niobrara Deanery. It was made up of those congregations that are almost entirely Indigenous people. We have an annual camp-out-synod called The Niobrara Convocation. It meets for purposes of mutual interests and concerns, for worship, and most importantly, for personal and social contact. Occasionally there are resolutions considered and passed which express the mind of the Convocation but they are not canonical and not binding on the diocese. They only

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inform the bishop and diocese of the mind of the Lakota people. In addition, many of these same Lakota people are also appointed by their parish or by the diocese, so were in attendance at the diocesan synod. Many have seats on committees and councils of the diocese. The Niobrara Deanery is a specific ministry, a special organization and structure of the church, a specialized gathering, but still a part of the diocese of South Dakota. This is something like what I imagine The Indigenous Anglican Church will be but with canonical and cultural patterns appropriate to Canada and The Anglican Church of Canada. In this one way we Indigenous Anglicans are not going far at all.

In another way we are going far away from where we have been. In the distant past we have seen many good-hearted servants of God go to extraordinary effort to bring the Gospel to Indigenous people wherever we have been. But, we have also seen our church being complicit in the past with dynamics that harmed us beyond comprehension as in the residential school era or in being silent as Indigenous communities' natural resources were appropriated. Interwoven with all the good grace of some people, there were the practices and evil damage caused by racism and colonialism. These forces exist in structures, policies, and practices independent of the good will of the church people involved. One major outcome of

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those intertwined historical forces was the assumption that Indigenous people were just not good enough to look after our own affairs. Government, education, social dynamics, economics, and our own church assumed we could not run our own dioceses, organize our congregations, nor develop our own theology. In this assumption of dependency we were supposedly not capable of being bishops, nor archbishops, nor could we manage a budget,. This assumption doesn't come only from the outside. Many of us Indigenous people learned the assumptions and we carry this negative self-image deep within ourselves. No one has to hold us down; we might do it to ourselves.

An Indigenous Anglican Church will begin to heal this pattern of oppression and dependency. An Indigenous Anglican Church will develop its own theology to enhance all other Christian theology because we have good thinkers among us. An Indigenous Anglican Church is capable of calling and forming its own clergy, as well as ordaining those who are our true leaders. An Indigenous Anglican Church will consecrate its own bishops as spiritual chiefs who will lead with skill and dignity. An Indigenous Anglican Church will raise up Indigenous Christians to the godly dignity that has always been ours from time immemorial.

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We saw the righteous coming together of Indigenous and Introduced persons in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis, embodied in the medicine man and chief Melchizedek and the settler Abraham. Melchizedek brings the fruit of the earth, bread and wine, and his blessing, to the encounter. Abraham brings one tenth of all he possesses and his resolution not to make a profit off Melchizedek. They come together in respect and dignity. In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we see the meeting of these two persons as a sacred encounter in which the Christ is made known in the image of the Indigenous chief Melchizedek. It is the Indigenous person who is a preview of the Christ. The relationship of the Anglican Church of Canada and The Indigenous Anglican Church can also manifest the kingdom of heaven.

There are some who are concerned about how an Indigenous Anglican Church should be supported. Abraham thought it righteous to give one tenth of all he possessed to the Indigenous leader Melchizedek. Should the Anglican Church of Canada do less than Abraham? One tenth of the resources of the Anglican Church of Canada would be a just portion, given that Indigenous peoples have already given the natural produce of the earth and vast amounts of land to Canada. In New Zealand, as the Maori Anglican Church was developing, their expectation from the Anglican Church of New

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Zealand was for sharing one half of the wealth of that church, and that was what was shared in the church of New Zealand. Ten percent does not approach that expectation.

### The Work of The Indigenous Anglican Church

The real work of an Indigenous Anglican Church would continue as it was directed by Jesus himself in the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of Matthew.

“...Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age” (vv.18-20).”

This command of Jesus is sometimes called The Great Commission. It is one of the defining directives from Jesus. We ought to think about this command because we have many brothers and sisters who have been so hurt by the residential school era that they are rightly suspicious and mistrustful of Christians and of the church. Personally, I am wary of many Christians and suspicious of the church because of

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what has happened to my relatives and to me. So, wouldn't it be best to just leave Indigenous people alone instead of trying to convert us? No, because Jesus commanded us to make disciples, to baptize, to teach all others how to be Christian.

Listen carefully to what Jesus said. He did not say, to convert us to speaking English. He did not say to baptize us into European and English customs and culture. He did not say we are to make disciples of free enterprise, profit motives, or scientific thinking. Jesus said to make disciples of all nations. How is this done? By loving people as much as God loves them. We love the sinner so much that they want to follow Jesus and be baptized. We are to love the meth addict until she wants the love of God as well. We love the suicidal teenager so much that he wants to live and to live the good life God gave him. We love the sex worker on the street until she realizes that her true lover is God. We love the gay cousin, the lesbian sister, until they rejoice in the way of love they have from God. "Make disciples of all nations," Jesus said. We are to show them that God loves them more than they ever knew and so they can love the world and other people.

An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its strength as a community to love Indigenous peoples enough to begin to heal our traumas and

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wounds. An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its strength as a community to expect justice and work for justice in our communities and lands as well as in other communities. An Indigenous Anglican Church uses its ceremonies to initiate children and adults into our Christian nation by baptism, confirmation, and confession. We use our ceremony of Holy Communion to nourish spiritually our new relatives and ourselves. All of these ceremonies teach us how much we are loved by God and how we can then love others. Jesus commanded us to “teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.” Those commands are mainly to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves.” This work will always be the work of an Indigenous Anglican Church on every reserve and in every urban Indigenous neighbourhood.

As the Anglican Church of Canada, we began this move toward a self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church almost 50 years ago with the publication of the book, *Beyond Traplines*, which called for a new relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Anglican Church of Canada, “based on solidarity, equality, and mutual respect” (Sacred Circle Highlights, June 2, 2018). Twenty-five years ago Archbishop Michael Peers delivered an apology from the Anglican Church to Indigenous peoples. Twenty four years ago, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada adopted a

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Covenant that, “coincided with the first Sacred Circle gatherings, focused on healing, self-determination, finding Indigenous voices, and establishing a true partnership with the wider church” (ibid).

Thirteen years ago the Anglican Council of Indigenous People began a search for a national Indigenous bishop. Eleven years ago, in 2007 General Synod officially installed Bishop Mark MacDonald and his work was already underway. In those years a number of Indigenous bishops have been consecrated and they have led in a variety of capacities and some have now retired.

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about all of our spiritual ancestors and then it says this:

“All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed he has prepared a city for them” (11:13-15).

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As Christians, our spiritual ancestors come from Jesus' nation. Our spiritual ancestors are from the nation of Israel. For Indigenous people our biological ancestors are Indigenous North Americans. All our ancestors had hoped for they never got to see. They lived in hope and saw their hopes but far off. They were satisfied with seeing what they really wanted in the distance. My Indigenous brothers and sisters now see, on the horizon, a spiritual homeland in an Indigenous Anglican Church. It may not be heaven, but it is a lot closer than the colonialized and dependent church in which we were passive observers. We enter this Indigenous Anglican Church with confidence and blessing since it is what God has prepared for us. In a similar way we were dissatisfied with the colonial Anglican Church, and God is not ashamed to be our God since we are clear that we want something better, a true church, in which we take responsibility for our divine Commission and our Anglican selves. We will preach, baptize, and teach the faith to every Indigenous nation as well as everyone else. This is a great responsibility and an even more blessed future.

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### The Gifts We Bring

God has made us who we are. Even from the beginning, God established our Indigenous cultures, the character of our souls, and God gave us an identity. Our languages, our cultures, our ceremonies, and our understandings of ourselves are God-given. The Indian Act and the plans of the long-ago Prime Minister John MacDonald and others tried to change who we are. The Indian Act was an attempt to manage us and wipe out our cultures and our identities. Today, we are here to say that all of those programs, all of those policies, all of those plans, failed! We are still here. Our cultures are here. Our identities are here. That part of The Indian Act failed. The program to kill the Indian to save the child has failed!

We are here and we bring our unique gifts to the Anglican Church of Canada. Our church was complicit with those efforts to erase our identity but we bring to the church the gift of reminding us all about what happened in the past. We bring to the church the gift of willingness to work toward reconciliation. Some day we will bring to the church total forgiveness for all that happened in the past. Eventually we will all stand on a dead colonial church and see the resurrection of a renewed Anglican Church of Canada that is deeply connected to this Turtle Island.

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Indigenous cultures are colourful and vibrant with the arts. Our cultures are what anthropologists call warm cultures that are expressive, artistic, musical, and highly ceremonial. An Indigenous Anglican Church is a church with good music, fancy clothes, and fancy ceremonies filled with smoke, rhythm, designs, good food, and totem figures.

The strength of Indigenous cultures is our spirituality. We speak easily about the remarkable spiritual experiences we have and the dreams and visions that are given to us. Canadian public culture is less and less religious and more and more embarrassed and silent about spiritual happenings. An Indigenous Anglican Church can help Canadian society recover its spiritual vocabulary and its boldness in speaking about its soul.

These are not our only gifts. As an Indigenous Anglican Church we bring our innate ability to be a good relative to all things. Our cultures and our ways of life have made us experts in relating well to the earth, to the spirit world, to the animal and plant nations. We know how to live in harmony with the earth and this is an ability the world desperately needs just now.

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As an Indigenous Anglican Church we bring a culture highly advanced in interpersonal relationships. We value human contact more than time, more than technology, and more than money. Indigenous cultures are so highly interdependent that only an almost x-ray vision helps one negotiate close relationships and interactions. We require a very high social intelligence to live well in our communities. This is a major reason why residential school environments could never become home. An Indigenous Anglican Church will bring the gift of restoring the dignity of human relationships.

We Indigenous Anglicans have many blessings. We have the blessing of our faithful ancestors who listened to what God showed them. They protected and used all that had been revealed to them: sweat lodges and pipe ceremonies, longhouse teachings and strawberry harvesting, totem pole raisings and potlatches, and the teachings of the Inuit. These are the blessings of the Old Testament of Indigenous North America. Indigenous Anglicans also have the blessings of knowing Jesus and the teachings that our spiritual ancestors knew that would bring us joy, righteousness, and a place in heaven.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last

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days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (1:1-3a).

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:1-2).