

February 28, 2018 **Open Door**, WLS
Diaconal Ministry focus, Lent 2
Genesis 17:1-7
Romans 4:13-18

I was consecrated two years ago at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Sour Springs Road on Six Nations territory. I am one of two deacons serving under call in this synod, so chances are pretty good that you haven't seen many of us out there. Deacons are public ministers who locate themselves at the intersection of church and world, the edge-place alongside those who are disenfranchised and vulnerable. Deacons strive to empower and support individuals and communities of baptized Christians as they discern God's mission for their context. Diaconal ministry may include accompanying those whose voices are discounted, or those who are unable to speak on their own behalf. Diaconal ministers equip and minister to all the baptized through service, teaching, public witness and spiritual care.

ELW song excerpt from #572 Now it is evening
(singing) *Who will be neighbour? Where there is caring, Christ is our light.*

Another way to think of the role of deacon is as a go-between or messenger. Deacons are kind of like Godly couriers or runners. The Haudenosaunee would send a runner to each nation to gather together the chiefs for the Grand Council at Onondaga. Perhaps in some way, I also gather folks together on behalf of the Eastern Synod to witness to the Gospel with the people on Six Nations.

I believe that God has placed deep in my heart, even years before I was born, the desire to be in relationship with Haudenosaunee people. I believe that the Two Row Wampum is a sacred covenant with the Haudenosaunee and with God, and that we as people of faith are called to live out its intent for all creation.

Decolonization holds great potential for settler peoples. Our Indigenous sisters and brothers would teach us how to listen with our hearts, not just our minds. When we recount God's promise to Abraham, we still hear these words as something that seems impossible to our ears. Abraham was fully convinced that God would do what God promises. Abraham heard God's promise with his heart. Through the covenant of the Two Row Wampum, we have an opportunity to live out God's grace in our time and place.

(singing) *Who will be neighbour? Where there is sharing, Christ is our life.*

Once upon a time, there was a Lutheran merchant who lived in Amsterdam. He founded a company to travel to the New World and chartered ships that sailed up what is now the Hudson River, trading in beaver pelts with the Haudenosaunee people. This exchange of goods was mutually beneficial and recognizing that the relationship had much to offer, the Dutch and the Haudenosaunee covenanted to respect each other's laws, culture and way of life through the Two Row Wampum treaty.

As New Amsterdam gave way to New York and the British took control of the Hudson River, our story moves to Europe where war was taking its toll. The occupation of the left bank of the Rhine River by French revolutionary forces meant suffering and hardship. 13,000 Palatines from the Rhine valley left Germany for England in 1709. Overwhelmed with the migration, Queen Anne offered passage to New York for nearly 3,000 people, many of them Lutherans. After working off the cost of their travel in naval camps along the Hudson, some families made their way up the river to Mohawk country.

The winter of 1712 was particularly harsh and conditions in the work camps were difficult with little food. The Germans sent a delegation to the Mohawks at Schoharie to request permission to settle on their lands. In the late winter about 150 families made a grueling journey through deep snow along narrow footpaths. The Mohawks welcomed and fed the Germans, showing them how to find wild potatoes and strawberries, and taught them how to grow corn. The German houses were within shouting distance of the Mohawk longhouse and folks regularly spent time with one another. These mixed Haudenosaunee-Palatine settlements developed all along the banks of the Mohawk River.

(singing) *Who will be neighbour? Where there is caring, Christ is our peace.*

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, bringing newness of life and the redemption of creation. We live in God's promise and are freed to be fully human and to wholly engage with the world. Rising again with Christ, the promise of the cross and resurrection allows us to be ministers of reconciliation in the here and now. And because we trust that God will accomplish even those things that we might consider impossible, we go forth into the world proclaiming God's promise of things that have not yet come into being.

God is calling us into relationship with God's self, with the land and with the Original People who have lived here since time immemorial. This sacred relationship demands that we act **with** First Nations partners, rather than **for** them, listening carefully for what is **not** being said. We are called in this kairos moment to place **relationships** before activities or deadlines, and to respect when process gets in the way of building community. We need to be honest and authentic about our privilege.

These words are from Peter Lewis, of the Uniting Church in Australia, who describes the need for a spiritual covenant with Australia's First Peoples:

“A treaty may become a pathway towards our deep need to belong to this place. Treaty for the non-indigenous is grace – not only because it offers us a legitimacy we do not deserve – not only because it offers us a forgiveness we do not deserve – but it gives us the hope that God can rebirth us as a people who may one day belong to the blessed land and not just rootless colonial shadows scarring the land.”

(p.23 *Covenant and Treaty*)