

SKINNER SERMON AWARD SUBMISSION: 2016

PEOPLE OF THE GOOD EARTH: A Celebration of First Nations

Given: October 11, 2015

*In fourteen hundred ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

*He had three ships and left from Spain;
He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.*

*Day after day they looked for land;
They dreamed of trees and rocks and sand.*

*October 12 their dream came true,
You never saw a happier crew!*

*"Indians! Indians!" Columbus cried;
His heart was filled with joyful pride.*

*But "India" the land was not;
It was the Bahamas, and it was hot.*

*The Arakawa natives were very nice;
They gave the sailors food and spice.*

*Columbus sailed on to find some gold
To bring back home, as he'd been told.*

*He made the trip again and again,
Trading gold to bring to Spain.*

*The first American? No, not quite.
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.*

Well ... no. Not even quite.

Perhaps, like me, you were taught this rhyme in elementary school. We can't be faulted for learning a lie when we were so young. We can't be shamed for believing the history our teachers, and the books we were given. History is, after all, written by the victors. And the victors in this case were operating under the Doctrine of Discovery – which were a series of declarations issued by the Pope in the 16th century, proclaiming that any land found by European explorers could be claimed in the name of the church. That is to say, any land found by white, Christian explorers occupied by non-white, non-Christian people could and should be taken, by whatever means necessary, for the ruling European classes – some claimed in the name of the church of Rome and some, the church of England.

We can't be held accountable for not knowing this when we were 8 or 9 or 10 year old children. But we're not children anymore.

*[sung] This land is your land
This land is my land
From California to the New York island
From the Redwood forest to the Gulf-stream waters
This land was made for you and me*

So sang Woody Guthrie. Whose family was my family's neighbor a couple generations back. My great uncle Clifford even played banjo with Woody in Okemah, Oklahoma, long before Woody went walkin' that ribbon of highway.

While *This Land is Your Land* has become a kind of alternative American Anthem, most know it's really a subversive, anti-capitalist, socialist song, with verses about seeing our friends and families in the welfare lines next to opulent estates with private property signs. And if you happen to be a folk singer from Oklahoma whose mother was born to tenant farmers in the same town as Woody Guthrie you've sung **all** those verses many times over.

But ... if you were raised white, you might not recognize the unconscious manifest destiny written into the words—*this land is **your** land, this land is **my** land.*

And ... if you were raised totally white, because your Native American great-grandmothers hid their tribal ancestry so that their families would not be shamed – from both sides -- you could miss it altogether until the people you need to ask for the truth long ago left this earth to join the ancestral guides.

Most of you know I wrote a song for my native grandmothers, as I began to claim my heritage and proclaim theirs. That was 1995.

Ten years later, in 2005 at SUUSI (Southeast Unitarian Universalist Summer Institute), my heart answered the call to ministry and I enrolled in seminary. In Boston.

It was there, at one of our historic congregations in Quincy, Massachusetts – that I got to know a young intern minister named Michelle Walsh – who then married the Rev. Clyde Grubbs, of our organization called DRUUMM, that's D-R-U-U-M-M which stands for "Diverse and Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist Multi-cultural Ministries."

Walk with me five more years, to our 2010 UU General Assembly, where the Ware Lecture speaker was the Native American activist Winona LaDuke of the Ojibwe tribe.

On the evening of the program, I arrived at the hall early to get an aisle seat before the other 5,000 or so folks arrived. And there I was, minding my own business, sitting alone reading about DRUUMM in the program book – when Clyde and Michelle from Boston appeared next to my seat.

When I looked up, Clyde said – *I've heard some of your story, about your grandmothers. We have a word for you. "Lost Blood." You're Lost Blood. But you don't have to stay that way. We come back for you. Some of us from DRUMM are sitting down front to encourage Winona. We have a place for you, if you would join us, Little Sister.*

And so, you see, this faith not only invites us to come as we are, but also to be-come who we've always been.

From page one of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's new book, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (published by our own Unitarian Universalist Beacon Press):

Under the crust of that portion of Earth called the United States of America "from California to the Gulf Stream waters" – are interred the bones, villages, fields, and sacred objects of American Indians. They cry out for their stories to be heard through their descendants, who carry the memories of how the country was founded and how it came to be as it is today.

It should not have happened that the great civilizations of the Western Hemisphere, the very evidence of the Western Hemisphere, were wantonly destroyed, the gradual progress of humanity interrupted and set upon a path of greed and destruction. Choices were made that forged that path toward destruction of life itself – the moment in which we now live and die as our planet shrivels, overheated. To learn and know this history is both a necessity and a responsibility to the ancestors and descendants of all parties.

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Here, then, are the names of the peoples who's land this really is. These are the First Nation's, the Lost Tribes of Florida. [note: adapt to First Nations of area in sermon is given.]

[congregation repeats each name]

Calusa ...

Okeechobee ...

Caloosahatchee ...

Miccosukee ...
Creek ...
Glades ...
Timicua ...
Tamequa ...
Appalachi ...
Choctaw ...
Ais (Ays) ...
Jeaga ...
Tocobaga ...
Guale ...
Pensacola ...
Ptano ...
Ocale ...
Mayaimi ...
Seminole ...
Matecumbe ...
Tequesta

The word “Tekesta” means, We, The People of the Good Earth. The Tequesta villages ranged from the Everglades to the mouth of what we know as the Miami river – Miami being a Calusa word that means “big water”. They lived here for thousands of years, as proven by artifacts found under the Earth’s crust beneath our feet, not least the grandmother’s skeleton found just up the road from here in December of 2013. Just up the road ... under a highway.

Chief Seattle, of the Suquamish tribe of the Northwestern territory charges us:

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground they spit upon themselves. This we

know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.

At this moment, let the sound of the wood flute carry us into a moment of reflection and connection.

With the sound of the rainstick, we will begin to breath together– then each simply follow our breath as the music leads us to a place of stillness where we may touch that place where all things, all of us, all the earth, are first born. With a second sound of the rainstick, we will return together.

[flute meditation, then at music's close]

And then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.

And I say the sacred hoop of my people was one of the many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy... But anywhere is the center of the world.

The words of the Wichasha Wakan, Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe of South Dakota.

[rattle] Today, we bless and re-sanctify this space we occupy

[rattle] that we may see in the sacred manner

[rattle] that we may speak in the sacred manner

[rattle] that we may walk in the sacred manner

[rattle] that we may heal the Earth and one another and ourselves

[rattle] that we may remember the First Nations, whose land we walk upon

[rattle] that the hoop of the world may be made whole and holy by the words of our mouths, and the work of our hands, and the very beating of our hearts, knowing that this place, this Beloved Community is, too, a center of the world -- that we, too, living this Unitarian Universalist faith more fully, can be the people of the good earth.

There is a Cree Tribe prophecy that says:

When the earth is sick and dying, there will come a tribe of people from all races ... who will put their faith in deeds, not words, and make the planet green again.

May we be that tribe.

[sung] #366, Heleluyan (Alleluia – Traditional Muskogee/Creek Indian)