

Aug. 26, 2018
Proverbs 2 (abbreviated version)
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
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Wisdom

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

Wisdom is a central character in the book of Proverbs, which seeks to share wisdom with the young. Today we will be reminding ourselves that we are called to seek wisdom. Anna Leslie will read the words. Clara Burnham and I will accompany the reading with appropriate hand motions. We will do the reading a second time and we invite you to join in with the hand motions on that second reading.

SERMON

Yesterday was the 301st anniversary of the first worship service to which we trace back our roots. That service happened down by the falls on the Androscoggin River. It was led by a missionary pastor and present were soldiers, a few settlers and a few Indians.

Today I want to recognize the richness of the life of those Native Americans. Our congregation's history book doesn't record what tribe they were from; yet, it is likely that that tribe no longer exists. The native peoples here in midcoast Maine were caught in the decades long turmoil and warfare that existed between the English settlers to the south of here and the French settlers to the north.

At last week's Scots-Irish Reunion at Bowdoin College, Colin Woodward spoke about these conflicts between the English and the French. In his book *American*

Nations, he indicates that the French settlers to the north and east of here generally treated the native people with more respect than the English settlers to the south. Maybe that is why the tribes that still exist in Maine are further to the north and east.

The story I shared earlier - *Remember Me: Tomah Joseph's Gift to Franklin Roosevelt* (Donald Soctomah and Jean Flahive) – comes from the Passamaquoddy tribe, whose tribal lands are in Washington County, our eastern most county, bordering Canada. The birch bark canoe mentioned in the story is on display in the Visitor Center at the Roosevelt Campobello International Park.

Archeological evidence indicates that these types of birchbark canoes are at least 2,500 years old. To build a birch bark canoe takes about 200 hours in the woods, finding and harvesting materials, and about 500 hours of construction.

The Wabanaki were so skilled in their canoe construction that when people began constructing wood and canvas canoes around the turn of the last century they followed the Wabanaki design. The Wabanaki were attentive to the world around them and used the wisdom of creation to build canoes.

The teaching of Jesus calls us to pay attention to the world around us to learn

about the wisdom and way of God. In his teachings and parables Jesus speaks of
-birds of the air and lilies of the field,
-mustard seed and olive trees
-lost sheep, lost coins, and lost children
-workers in the vineyard and the sower in the field.

Most of Jesus' teaching took place out in the field, on the hillside, or on the beach. He calls us to pay attention to the life right around us. This is the type of wisdom that we also find embedded in the spirituality of Native Americans.

In these days where the choices of the developed world regarding how we interact with the rest of creation are coming back to haunt us, we would be wise to learn from our Native American neighbors. This week I am mindful of the harbor seals along the coast that are dying from the effects of pollution. We grieve, but we also need to repent. We need to adopt the long view.

Maybe you have cleaning products at your home that are called *Seventh Generation*. These environmentally conscious products come from a corporation that has trademarked the name *Seventh Generation*. However, that name really belongs to the Iroquois nation whose great law was to ask, before making any big decisions, "What is the impact of this decision on the next seven generations?"

What would you have done differently in your own life if that had been a guiding question for you? What would we do differently as a congregation if we were holding in prayer the next seven generations? What would we do differently as a country?

Or in the words of Jesus, "How are our decisions loving God, loving neighbor, and loving self?" Taking the long view calls for maturity and commitment. Following the national political news this last week, I have found myself asking, "Where are the grown-ups?"

Where is the wisdom in tax fraud, bank fraud, bribery, deception? Is this not demonic wisdom that cares more about success in the ways of the world than the ways of the Spirit? As the biblical wisdom reminds us – the sins of the fathers and mothers ripple into the future generations.

We are grateful for the grown ups who have been holding those in the headlines accountable.

Yet, if you move beyond the headlines in the news, you find that the good news is in local communities and regions where people are working across political categories, across national boundaries even, to get done what needs to be done for the good of the people. Such as communities in the U.S. and in Mexico who work together to share the resource of the water of the Rio Grande. In one place there is even a pipe that goes through a hole in the border wall to let the water be shared. Wisdom does not belong to any one people, country, culture or religion. Wisdom is the work of the Spirit in all places and is often best shared and enacted upon by direct contact with one another.

Thank God for the ways that Tomah Joseph shared wisdom with Franklin Delano Roosevelt.