

Incarnation and Redemption – A Natural Connection

Rev. Patrick Stephens

Fifth Week of Lent

Friday, April 8

Scripture

1 John 5:6

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth

Reflection

The gospel accounts depict a strong literary connection between Jesus' birth and death. The biblical events of Christmas are very closely linked to those of Holy Week. In Jesus, God descends into the deepest and most universal experiences of humanity. The fullness of this incarnate reality is clearly made known in the graphic description of Jesus' body being pierced by a Roman soldier. The gospel of John tells us that when this occurs, "blood and water came out."

Later, in the first letter of John, the author reminds us of this event as he describes Christ as "the one who came by water and blood." To my ears, this description of Jesus seems to speak as much about his departure as it does of his arrival: his birth.

Childbirth is a universally familiar human experience. In every culture, there is the need for trained birth attendants, midwives, and healthcare workers who help ensure that mothers and newborns are safe and healthy throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and the early stages of infancy. Healthy mothers and children are part of a healthy community.

As we prepare to journey through the story of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, let us reflect on the universality, not only of death, but of birth. And may we be moved to help ensure that all mothers and children can be safely and appropriately cared for as they welcome new life through childbirth.

Prayer

Gracious God, creator and sustainer of human life, we praise you that you have called us to share in your creative acts in the great mystery of childbirth. We pray for all women who are preparing to welcome new life. May they be brought safely through the time of pregnancy and labour. Grant that all may know your joy in bringing new life into this world which you love, in the name of him who was born of a woman, Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Adapted from the Prayers of ansgiving for the Birth of a Child, Book of Alternative Services

Indigenous Midwives partnership crosses borders

In many of the world's Indigenous communities, women do not have access to midwives and must travel far from home, sometimes alone, to give birth in a hospital. The isolation from family and community can cause stress and fear, or worse, lead to an increase in maternal or infant mortality.

For the past three years, PWRDF has been nurturing a partnership of Indigenous midwives from Canada, Peru and Mexico. The support, more than \$100,000, has allowed midwives to share best practices, develop curriculum and learn from each others' Indigenous commonalities.

It started in May 2017, when representatives of Ryerson University's Aboriginal Initiatives (Canada), KinalAntzetik (Mexico) and CHIRAPAQ (Peru) met in Toronto at an international conference of midwives to establish goals and terms for the partnership.

In 2018, they met again at the 17th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). There, Cheryllee Bourgeois, a Métis midwife and professor at Ryerson, addressed the session. She pleaded with member nations to tackle the oppression facing Indigenous midwives around the world and claimed that the oppression of Indigenous midwives is in violation of articles 24 and 25 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In April 2019, the third year of the program, close to 100 Indigenous midwives gathered in Peru for the First International Gathering of Indigenous Midwives of the Americas. Then in August, they met again in Mexico.

Both events began with traditional Indigenous ceremonies offered by the Elders and Traditional Spiritual Keepers. They safeguarded the gathering by grounding it on Indigenous principles and values such as respect, love and participation.

Midwives discussed the challenges of Indigenous midwifery and how to ensure the practice can continue in the three countries. Sessions focused on pregnancy, childbirth and the use of medicinal plants in this ancestral practice. Other important discussions included:

- The importance of acknowledging midwifery knowledge rather than appropriating it.
- Acknowledging racism and discrimination in education systems, in the validation and recognition of traditional Indigenous midwifery knowledge, and in access to the Western healthcare system, not only for pregnant women but also for their mothers, caregivers and families.
- The criminalization of Indigenous midwifery and threats to eliminate this ancestral practice.

"I think that Indigenous people connecting across countries internationally is actually critical to the learning and building of Indigenous midwifery," said Bourgeois. "There are pieces of knowledge that midwives hold that are so different or don't exist in Canada, so it is a rich exchange in terms of ways to move forward, how people come together, and the relationship that people have with their communities in terms of the care that they are providing."

"The three partners have developed a relationship of trust," writes José Zárate, PWRDF's Canadian Indigenous Communities and Latin American- Caribbean Development Program Coordinator. He also credits the partners' appearances at the UNPFII (also again in 2019) with conquering a strategic space in the international arena. "This contributed to identifying strategic allies (midwives, health sector, civil

society, etc.), who recognize their pioneering work as trailblazers in a sector that is very dismissive of their knowledge.”

Read the whole story on our website at

<https://pwrdf.org/indigenous-midwives-partnership-crosses-borders/>