

Centre and Library for the Bible and Social Justice, Stony Point, New York

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Jennifer Henry

I want to express my gratitude to be welcomed by Chief Perry as a guest on these lands. I want to express my gratitude to be welcomed into this Stony Point community of faith and struggle. And, I bring greetings from KAIROS, the ecological justice and human rights organization of Canadian churches.

My family came here, somewhere roughly around here, somewhere close to this part of Turtle Island, in the early 1600's. It is no doubt that they, we, were collaborators, protagonists in 400 years of the horrible genocidal legacy of colonization. I strive to live accountable to that devastating reality.

I work and serve churches, who are both those who participated in empires' colonial horrors, like Indian residential schools, and those very same churches who strive to be places of community, repentance, solidarity and struggle—churches trying to be movements not monuments.

We have to recognize that when I say I serve the churches I also mean the Indigenous church, Indigenous Christians who have lived a subversively, resiliently in the inbetween.

I enter into any conversation aware of my marks of origin—white, settler, Christian, middle class—and the call that governs, my life, our work at KAIROS—do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. Both my privilege and my aspirations to allyship are true.

Today I am honoured to be asked to offer a window into the critical struggles in a Canadian context. It will be imperfect and limited, through my particular eyes, some but by no means all of what we struggle with as people of faith and justice in the Canadian context now.

I want to come in through a story from our shared faith. A memorable ancient story that I think taps into a stories of our time, of my place. It a story that generates other stories.

The first story goes like this. There was a woman who knew Jesus, loved Jesus. Her knowledge of him, her connectedness to him, meant that unlike many of the others around him, she could see. She could see the risks of his ministry. She could see the harms that his trajectory of love would compel from the powerful. She knew the very body of his embodied justice was at risk, by the threats of empire.

And so she did something. She had to do something. An intimate gesture enacted on a public stage. Not sure people would listen she chose to speak volumes with dramatic action. A bold ritual, a resonant symbol and through it puncture the denial of others around him did not yet comprehend.

There are many versions of what she did, but let's follow the original witness and say she brings a bottle, a precious bottle. And finding her moment she breaks open that bottle and pours oil over his head. She pours oil of nard over his head, anointing him, to the scandal of those looking on--an anointing for burial. An act with no words, but that still shouted "wake up, wake up. Can't you see he is threatened with death. Wake up, we may lose him--him who has become our way, our life."

The others are confused, they cannot comprehend. They focus on money, how much the oil costs, but close their hearts to questions of real value.

And yet echoing through the years, her public act of witness, presiding at the ritual of his dying, a symbolic act, a sacramental act—is a clarion call to us.

I love this story, and it lives for me, echoes for me, in this very time. Let's hold on to the story, but bring it into our time by thinking about Jesus' body—that which she anoints--as our suffering world, our threatened creation. That body of God, as our world.

Right now, in our *kairos* time there are women, who know, who can see what we are doing to the body, our mother. Who from their deep connectedness to the earth, deep intimacy with the land and waters, can see our Earth dying. Women, who with fierce love and justice, are tending to this aching world. Binding up the land's bleeding wounds. Comforting diseased waters. Anointing sickened skies. They are women who see, women who know. And they are acting, publicly, symbolically, to wake us up. In my place and time, it is Indigenous women who are risking everything, so that we might know too.

I think about Helen Knott—vibrant and powerful young leader that we strive to ally with. She is the great, great granddaughter of Chief Bigfoot. Right now she working to protect the Peace River Valley of Northern British Columbia from the Site C dam, fearing for the “107 kilometres of land the project would flood, destroying farmland, sacred burial grounds, as well as areas Treaty 8 First Nations use for hunting, fishing, gathering medicines and other cultural reasons.”¹

When you ask Helen why she is so determined she talks about her deep sense of connection with the land. Her right to “access the blood memories that exist”² that continue to tell her story. Recognizing the threat to the earth, she and others, put their bodies between the land and BC Hydro by setting up a protest camp, ultimately risking arrest when the courts granted an injunction to remove the protest. Hers has been a ritual of presence, and there have been other public acts of witness including the watery action “Paddle the Peace”.

Recently, despite fancy words, despite consent withheld by First Nations, despite a case still in the courts, despite massive ecological impact, our Prime Minister granted approval of the Site C dam.

Helen sees, she knows, she acts in public witness to wake us up to the threats to land and water, the body of Mother Earth, the body of God, inviting our solidarity.

Across the globe but still directly connected to Canada, I think of Michelle Campos of the Lumad people. She was only 17 when her father was brutally killed by paramilitary forces in the Philippines. Michelle left her studies to return home and give leadership to the movement to protect her ancestral land and its people from the impact of militarized resource extraction.

¹ Joanna Smith, “Aboriginal activist fears B.C. dam project will destroy sacred land,” *Thestar.com* (February 23, 2016) <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/02/23/aboriginal-activist-fears-bc-dam-project-will-destroy-sacred-land.html> (accessed July 21, 2016).

² Helen Knott as quoted by Joanna Smith, “Aboriginal activist fears B.C. dam project will destroy sacred land.”

Here's her voice: "We have a proud culture and self-reliant communities in the lush forests, clear waters, and rugged mountain ranges of the island of Mindanao. But in my community, large-scale mining interests are sowing fear and violence...they are taking our land and killing our people, too."³ Michelle's profound act of public witness was to lead a caravan of 700 Lumad people over 1000 kilometres to Manila to protest the intimidation and forced displacement of earth defenders from their community—a risky action named by some a "pilgrimage of justice and peace."⁴

Michelle's recognized the threat to ancestral land and risked leading a sacred pilgrimage, in the earth's defense. Her pilgrimage will soon come to Canada, to tell her story, because among the mining companies causing harm are those that are Canadian. Her courage is a clarion call to ecological integrity and human rights in a world that like the grumbling disciples are fixated on profit.

And on the other side of Canada from Helen, and on the other side of the age divide, is Maliseet grandmother Alma Brooks. I roomed with this elder in bunk beds in the New York City YWCA as we endeavoured to stand together at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Alma saw the threats to the waters of the "beautiful river." She saw her people and culture, so connected to the land and water, dying. She tried to get the band councillors to listen to her. But she felt they would not wake up, and so she began to rebuild her nation and beyond, strengthening the Wabanaki confederacy, restoring women's leadership roles, and recovering ceremonies. She and other grandmothers hosted water convergence ceremonies inviting settler neighbours to join in symbolic actions against the threats to waters, including of fracking. Against fracking, settler and Indigenous communities, stood together and won in New Brunswick, at least for now.

These are the only some of the women we have come to know, come to love, who out of their deep connection feel the earth threatened at the hands of our empire. We are pretty sure that while our view is obscured by interests and privilege, they see clearly, that our earth is dying, leading them to public acts of ritual—presence, pilgrimage, ceremony, lament, mourning, liturgies of justice. Just as the unnamed woman tried in her bold act to startle the community to insight and action, we are presented with that challenge now. Their ritual action, their direct action, endeavours to alert us to the death threats against the earth. Will we, like the disciples, stay distracted, or fixate on the money (or our pension funds)? Or will we as in the Markan text be "with them"—not inevitability, but solidarity and accompaniment.

These stories happen against a backdrop of accelerating climate impact in the fragile north, persistent racism such that would lead a farmer to shoot an Indigenous youth coming on to his property to seek help for a flat tire—not unrelated to the deaths of black men by police in your cities and ours, and violence against women—at least 1200, maybe many more missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls. Vulnerabilities of women at the big male-dominated extractive sites like the oil sands in Canada are linked to violence against women in extractive wars exacerbated by our companies abroad, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our consumerism is a backdrop. When migrant workers pushed out of

³ Michelle Campos, "Stand with indigenous Peoples in the Philippines," <https://350.org/stand-with-indigenous-people-in-the-philippines/> (accessed November 3, 2016).

⁴ World Council of Churches, "Indigenous people, the Lumad, appeal for human rights in the Philippines," World Council of Churches (November 03 2015) <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/indigenous-people-the-lumad-appeal-for-human-rights-in-the-philippines> (accessed July 21, 2016).

their countries by our extractivism come to work in services or to help extract resources in Canada, temporary workers encouraged despite high unemployment rates for Indigenous people in the area that aren't counted because they live on reserve, potentially exploited in the labour even as the projects they work on or beside contribute to climate change—another push factor for migration—it is all connected.

It is my sense that is at cross roads of human rights and ecological justice that our critical struggles are being waged. In Canada, over and over again we are presented with issues that challenge both Indigenous rights and ecological integrity. These are the struggles facing us just when, as churches, we claim to seek reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and with creation.

The dilemma is that there are no words that serve, no apologies that are sufficient, no promises that will do this time. We have done that already. As my Friend and colleague, Cayuga Leader Adrian Jacobs says, “we don't have a problem with forgiveness. We have a problem with believing you.”

You have to understand that in Canada we have listened to the testimonies of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission—7000 testimonies of courageous Indian residential school survivors that gave us a most harrowing glimpse into colonization wounds and our deep culpabilities as settlers and churches. We learned that our destruction of the people of the land went hand in hand with our destruction of creation. Indigenous world views, that are medicine to the current self-inflicted ecological crisis, are those which we actively sought to suppress. Ceremonies that spoke right to the heart of connection with earth, the sun dance and potlatch were banned. “Heathen, pagan, and of the devil”—were word weapons in our spiritual warfare. Our context as churches is repentance and now, only action will do.

Our commitment to reconciliation as churches, as a country, cannot simply be about a change in attitude, but must shift power and resources. The way to reconciliation is through expressions of justice in the now. It is not simply our government but our churches that are being challenged with what the movement Idle No More calls #deedsnotwords. Our apologies must become words made flesh in acts of solidarity and justice.

The possibility, even probability is that, despite our stated commitment, we like the disciples may fixate on money, profit, rather than the real value women like Helen, Michelle, and Alma alert us to. The disciples said “why this waste? This perfume might have been sold?” (Mark 14:5) We say, what about our fiduciary responsibility and the jobs in the fossil fuel industries.

We are increasingly being asked to heed the clarion call and risk standing with Indigenous peoples (in whatever way we can) in front of pipelines, dams, and fracking trucks, to risk our financial health by activating our investments, our pension funds. To risk our reputations by aligning with those deemed “radical,” or even worse by traditional Canadian church standards, those called impolite.

And we are called into this even as we are feeling cautious, losing members, threatened with organizational survival. In the processes of colonization, the Canadian churches chose empire, were empire. What and who do we choose now when our overlap with the powers that be is lessening? When there is a little less imperial noise in our ears? “Deconstantinization”—halleluah, halleluah.

It's a human rights crisis, and ecological crisis, but so much more for us, as Canadian churches it's a crisis of faith and integrity, that we have so horribly failed throughout our history, and cannot fail again.

The woman of Mark's Gospel is unnamed, I want to yell Helen, Michelle, Alma...Berta Caceres, Sylvia, Christie, Anne Marie, Winona, Vivienne and so many more...whose powerful acts of witness in defense of our Mother, Her Body, are calling us to wake up, wake up, even at risk of their own lives. As Indigenous women they are following their sacred instructions to be custodians of the Creator's beautiful land. We have our sacred instructions too, do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with our God. May we—Christians--churches--be idle no more in living up to our responsibilities.