

Reflection for Holy Week

(thanks to Mary Dostal, osu)



We begin Holy Week reflecting on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. As the Roman emperor processes into the city upon a horse surrounded with symbols of power, Jesus processes in on a donkey. (Mark 11). Jesus is confronting the domination system based on political



oppression and economic exploitation. In light of racism in our country, Mark's gospel is calling us to dismantle racism which upholds the empire. We are called to bring about the kingdom of God where peace, equality and reverence for all people reigns.

Since I work with many Native Americans I was asked to write a reflection on racism as Native Americans experience it. I asked Marty Runsabove to write her reflections for us.

According to the Dictionary website, discrimination is the treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit. Looks simple in black and white, feels objective reading it from paper.

I am going to share a glimpse of what it was like to experience discrimination with you from a child's eyes. My Dad is white and my Mother Northern Cheyenne. On both sides I have felt the sting of being different. My home is the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. My mother is the oldest of 8, she is the only one who had children with someone who is not Native American. Her family is very proud of being full blood. Some of my cousins would tease me or snicker at me how children do when they bicker among each other. They would say things like, "Dirty dishwater hair" or "You're just a white girl". I was always trying to win their acceptance – climbing the highest in a tree, running the fastest, spitting the farthest, etc. Now on the other side of the family I felt out of place internally and externally. The biggest factors for me that I could identify was the difference in skin and eye color. The feeling of being different was seated firmly inside of me. The unspoken aspects that caused confusion were differences in rules, the family roles, the cultural practices values, belief systems, and general family patterns.

As a new student (fourth grade) being in a biracial family entering into an all-white school without the tools to navigate the emotional turmoil of transferring school and being away from my family on the reservation, I was already afraid, nervous and homesick. I was staying with my father's parents that year. My first day of school I remember the morning bell ringing for us to line up so we could go inside for breakfast.

All of a sudden, I felt a kick to the back of my head and I was face planted on the cement. All the excited chatter of children lining up to start the first day of a new school year moments before came to a sudden halt. Complete silence. For me that moment felt like a life time. I felt so much shame and for some reason I felt that these kids were beautiful and I was a dirty Indian from the reservation. I think that's what the boy who kicked me was saying, "Go back to the rez you dirty Indian." When there was finally a noise it was from a teacher coming to pick me up asking if I was ok. I realize now that it was an environment where teachers were ignorant in how to respond in such a situation.

However, as a child I thought I was just "a dirty little Indian." That was my outward experience and paired with the inner turmoil of being different and feeling less on both sides of my family it was pretty intense. I have throughout life dealt with feelings and or treatment of being inferior. I am thankful today to have the knowledge I do and the healing that comes with forgiveness. I know that I am beautifully and wonderfully made in the image of my father, I know Jesus died on the cross for me and I am washed clean of sin. I am forgiven and in recognizing the weight of that gift that was freely given unto me I also forgive.

Another aspect of racism is that in the Covid-19 pandemic we see clearly the inequalities in our health care system as a higher percentage of the poor and people of color died which is true for Native Americans. This is due to several factors among which are overcrowding in housing due to poverty and poor healthcare which violates U.S. treaties which guaranteed them healthcare. In Montana, primarily inhabited by Caucasians, Native Americans are 7% of our population and yet 18% of the deaths from the Corona virus were Native Americans.

Another issue that has gained public attention in Montana is Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (MMIW). The latest statics are from February 2021. There are 167 active cases in Montana of missing people and 31% of these are Native Americans. Again, Native Americans are 7% of the population of Montana and yet 24% of the MMIP. In the past year due to the out cries of the Native Americans there are the beginnings of getting the various law enforcement agencies to work together – BIA police, sheriff departments, FBI. On a reservation when a rape or murder occurs the FBI are involved. The people are also demanding a much quicker response when someone is reported missing. There have been 2 recent cases where a young woman was reported missing and found after several weeks less than a quarter of a mile from where she was last seen.



I am including a letter to the Billings Gazette that was written last fall by a Crow girl who has been in the Daughters of Tradition at Angela's Piazza.

"I am a 15-year-old student at Lodge Grass High. MMIW is also known as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. It's a movement to raise awareness about the epidemic of native women going missing or being killed. A red hand symbol stands for the Native American woman who are being silenced or stolen. Native American

Women are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of sexual assault when compared to the general population, according to the U.S, Department of Justice. In Canada, Native women are more likely to be murdered or raped. While in the U.S. it is 10 times worse. Eighty-six percent of non-natives committed sex crimes that were reported by Native American women and men. Reports from native women are more likely to be ignored. “Nearly 6,000 MMIW cases were cataloged in 2016, according to the National Crime Information Center.

Former Senator Heidi Heitkamp introduced Savanna’s Act which was passed during the 116th Congress. The Savanna Act was named after Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind. She was 22 years old found murdered near the Red River north of Fargo in 2017. She was pregnant and her unborn baby was cut out of her, but the baby survived. Also, President Trump signed the bill for Savanna’s Act and it passed.



Rosalie Fish, a member of the Cowlitz Tribe, chose to run at the Class 1B state meet at Eastern Washington University. She ran with a red handprint on her face. She also put MMIW on her front right leg. She ran around the track 18 times. She took fourth place. She was disappointed but at the same time, she was proud to represent and run for MMIW.

MMIW is important, and we should never forget about the Native women who are stolen and killed.

Sienna Rides the Bear
Billings

Video Resources:

"Running for MMIW" by Rosalie Fish

"Resistance, Resilience, and Revitalization" by Patti Doyle Bedwell

As we reflect on these issues in light of racism in our country and Jesus procession into Jerusalem, what actions am I being called to take so that as Jesus symbolic action, so too I am joined with people of color helping to dismantle racism?

How do we help women find their voices?