

## Makoce Ikikcupi (Land Recovery)

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

16th Sunday after Pentecost - September 25, 2022

Texts: Genesis 2:4-10, 15; Luke 16:19-31

Just before the service, we watched a piece of this “Landback” video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNQ7rgaxnIo&t=19s>, from minute 1:15-3:15).

It’s from the Makoce Ikikcupi website and can be accessed there as well.

<https://makoceikikcupi.com/our-dream/>

I invited the congregation to note the similarities in the origin stories.

### SCRIPTURE LESSON Genesis 2:4-10, 15

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed the human from the dust of the ground, from the humus, and breathed into the human’s nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there put the human which had been formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The Lord God took and put the human in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.



### GOSPEL READING Luke 16:19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with allsores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and

saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn



them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

You might think that Jesus told this story to scare people into being good. Think again. Jesus didn’t *ever* try to scare people into heaven. So what does this mean? We’ll come back to that, but first let me tell you another story. Just to let you know, this is a sad story with a happy ending.



A while ago, a bunch of hungry, oppressed people raised their hopes and a little money and set off across land and sea in search of a new life. Quite a few died on the way. Often they were confused and frightened, but they kept going. One woman’s baby died on the long journey. She held its little body under her coat, close to her heart, for days, so she could bury it wherever she ended up. And these people did find a home: a big land ripe for farming. Their hearts ached for loved ones they would never see

again. But their faith was strong; they trusted that God had a plan for them. With thrift and back-breaking work, they survived. They thrived. Some got rich. *(Photo: unknown immigrants from the web. Not my ancestors. But notice the wooden shoes!)*

That’s my family’s story. That woman hiding her child’s body? My great-grandmother.

Let me tell you another story. A bunch of people lived a good life on a good land for many generations. Life wasn’t easy, but they found ways to survive, hunting, fishing, harvesting what the land offered. They called the land “Mni Sota Makoce:” land where the water reflects the sky. Then more people arrived; they loved the land, too, but used it differently. Promises to pay were made, but never kept. Starving, the original people battled the newcomers, and lost. Some were executed, many were marched to a concentration camp at the place they knew as birthplace of their people. They called it Bdote; the others, Fort Snelling. Many of them died of diseases, cold, or hunger. Those who remained were moved to a place where there wasn’t much water to reflect the sky. But they survived. Now they’re trying to buy back some of the land that was stolen from them. That project is called Makoce Ikikcupi. That means “Land Recovery,” in the Dakota language.



I never heard that story when I was little. And that’s kind of surprising, because I grew up in a town on land that was sacred to the Dakota people: There’s a kind of red rock there that’s not found anywhere else on earth, a gift from the Great Spirit. This is the story I did hear: long ago the Great Spirit saw his children fighting one another, and it grieved his heart. so he sent a flood to cover all the

land. People of every tribe died, and their blood flowed together into the rock, dyeing it red. The

red rock reminded them that the Great Spirit loves peace, not war. At church, I heard how God, troubled by humanity's violent behavior, caused a flood to cover all the earth. Noah built an ark and saved all the animals, and afterward God sent a rainbow and a dove with an olive branch - all signs that God loves peace, not war. Even as a child, I knew that both stories were true, just in different ways. I was proud that I lived in a town where stories about peace were told and taught.

The sad part of that story is that the actual Dakota people who lived in the town and attended my school were pretty much invisible. At the red rock quarries, we could watch some old Indians carving the red rock into beautiful things, some sacred, some knock-offs for tourists. But those Indians were like exhibits in a museum. I never learned their life stories. I didn't see them, I didn't hear them. That doesn't mean I was a bad person. I was just oblivious.

Which brings me back to Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus. First of all, it's a parable, not a factual description. Abraham isn't the same as God, right? Jesus never says this rich man was bad. I think he even loved him. Abraham calls him "Child." Pretty tender! But this rich guy was oblivious. Here's Lazarus right outside his door but invisible to him. He didn't hate Lazarus; if he had some menial little task that needed to be done, he might even consider giving him a job. Even when he's in Hades and Lazarus is with Abraham, he thinks he can boss him around: "Send him down here with some water! Send him to my brothers!" Abraham says, "Lazarus can't do that! No one can. And besides, if your brothers haven't heard the stories of Moses, Amos, Isaiah, they won't hear anyone. Not even if someone comes back from the dead."

All his life, this man only heard one story and it probably went like this: "Your ancestors worked hard and struggled, made some money, rose to the top, and now all that is yours. Congratulations." It might even have been a true story. Just like my forebears struggled and worked and earned a good life. I'm still reaping the rewards of a stable childhood and good education. And my northern European ancestry.

But this rich man's story wasn't the only story. Just like my family story wasn't the only true story. What story did you hear about your family background? What stories did you hear about other people? Your story isn't wrong or bad. And not hearing other stories doesn't mean we're bad people, but we're cheating ourselves out of the whole truth. I think Jesus was saying, "Now is the time to look and listen, not after you die!"

Now is the time. You've heard me talk about this committee that Session is forming this week. The purpose is to decide how to spend 10% of the inheritance we unexpectedly received this year, on people outside the church. The amount is generous; though weighed against all the needs in the world, it's just a tiny drop in a huge bucket. Maybe Margaret is giving us one last challenge in her ever-gentle way. What if the point is not for us to be the great white saviors riding in with big bags of cash? What if the point is that this is our chance to go out and explore and learn some different stories than the ones we've always told ourselves? To have our eyes and

ears opened to stories right here in our own community? Or around the world? The lives we save may be our own!

For me, the Dakota land buy-back project called Makoce Ikikcupi, Land Recovery, has given me a new appreciation for my ancestors and their struggles, and a new feeling for this land we live on. I realize how precious and how beautiful it is, and how fragile, and how much I love it. I've learned that the name of the Sisseton tribe that lived around here means "the medicine people who live by the water." Medicine people? Mayo Clinic? Coincidence? You tell me!

There are similarities among our various stories. So many people have lost their homelands, suffered, struggled. Unlike some others, my people chose to move, to migrate. Others had no choice. We need to recognize the differences as well as the similarities. But the chasm that separates us? It doesn't exist anywhere except in our own minds. "It's not an eternal abyss. It's a wound we hold in our hearts till we choose to heal it."<sup>1</sup> There is so much more to be recovered than just land: there are relationships, understanding, connection, growth, the health of the planet, and maybe even our eternal lives. It's time to heal. Did I promise a happy ending? Well, you know what they say: If you're not happy, it's not the ending yet. But we can trust that the ending will be happy, because the future is in God's own hands. Amen. TBTG

### **Prayers**

Many and great, O God, are your works. You made the earth and sky; you set the heavens with stars and spread the mountains and plains. Deep seas obey your voice. You made all human families with their own stories. Teach us to listen, to understand, and to love.

We pray for all people who have lost or left homelands because of the threat of violence, starvation, or war. We pray for women in Iran and elsewhere, whose personhood is restricted by oppressive man-made laws.

We pray for the people of Puerto Rico, whose story is again devastated by a destructive hurricane; for the people of the Southwest, battling drought and wildfire; for the people whose lives are pushed to the brink of survival by war or inflation.

We pray for the people of this community, and of this congregation: may we open our hearts to learn and connect; may we use our gifts for the good of all. Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Chasm*. [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net), September 19, 2022.