

Acknowledging Land

The world is made of atoms - hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, and so forth.

Each atom is further made up of protons, electrons, and sometimes, neutrons. What makes hydrogen different than oxygen is how many protons and electrons the atom has... but not neutrons. Oxygen can have 1 or over 100 neutrons and still be oxygen. These neutrons add mass to the atom. They also make the atom stable, or unstable and therefore radioactive. Isotopes are atoms that have the same protons and electrons, but not the same number of neutrons. This is really important in our area - Northern Ontario is a huge source of radioactive isotopes, which are used in hospitals in things such as chemotherapy.

But isotopes are used in many different fields - agriculture, and geology, and archeology.

Every body of water, and every area of land, has an isotope profile. The oxygen and carbon, strontium and nitrogen, and so forth that make up that area more or less have a "usual" amount of neutrons. This makes a fingerprint, per se, of that area. So the fingerprint of Manitoulin looks different than the fingerprint of Sudbury. The animals, plants, and humans who live in that area pick up the same fingerprint. I drink the water from the channel. The channel's fingerprint is stamped on me. I carry the pattern of the channel's isotopes. I eat the cows that eat the grass that grows on Manitoulin. The soil's print goes to the grass, then to the cow, then to me.

The isotope fingerprints are found in our bones, and teeth, nail and hair - in all of us - because our body uses these atoms to grow and live. And the atoms have the isotope fingerprints.

Now this is incredible - where we live, what we eat, what we drink, what we breathe is permanently marked on us.

In Scotland, there are bodies buried in the bogs. At one archeology site, archeologists took tiny samples of the teeth and bones of the bodies and studied their isotope fingerprints. They learned that in this graveyard, most people were born, lived, and died right near the bog. But in two people, they had grown up elsewhere and moved to the bog, but had been living in the bog community for at least 10 years. They also saw that everyone - young and old, rich and poor, had about the same diet... and ancient Scottish people apparently abhorred seafood and refused to eat it. All of that story is written in their bodies.

So I consider my own body. I have grown new hair since moving to Manitoulin. So I have Manitoulin hair. But I haven't grown new teeth. My teeth put me solidly in Kilbourne, Ohio because that is where I was when I grew them. My daughter's teeth tell a different story - her baby teeth speak of Columbus, Ohio but her adult teeth speak of Manitoulin. Both of us carry stories of a modern world where food comes from great distances - literally from the other side of the world - and both of us carry stories of a world where we breath more carbon than in past generations.

We are the Earth. The Earth is us.

Sacred stories - in the Jewish and Christian tradition, in the Odawa and Ojibwe tradition, and in other traditions - sacred stories tell us we are made of soil and earth, wind and breath. Science tells us the same story.

You are what you eat.

And breathe.

And drink.

A land acknowledgement is so much more than naming treaties, and ancestral lands. It is literally acknowledging the land - this incredible creation of God from which so much life grows, thrives, decays and returns to endlessly. A land acknowledgement is saying this land is sacred, set aside, unique. Here our ancestors lived. Here they are buried. Here our isotopic fingerprints are picked up. Here we live and thank God for land because when the world was flooded nearly all life died. We are land people. Thank you, God, for land. Thank you land, for being our home and our very flesh and bones.

Jesus told us to eat and drink whenever we would, together, in memory of him. This doesn't just unite us in soul and spirit. This also puts a fingerprint on us all from the shared bread and drink. We carry the same isotopes from the meal. We physically unite. To me, this is so poetic, so perfectly who God is - God is Creator. Not just spirit. Not just soul. But Creator - of land and water, of grapes and grains - of you and I. And Jesus didn't come to us just in spirit - but physically too. Walked among us. Lived with us. Died with us. Rose and promised we'd rise with him. Physical and spiritual, uniting. Visible and invisible, both, marked with the fingerprints of God. It is poetry. It is religion. It is spirituality. It is physicality. It is worship and gratitude for the Creator and the garden God has placed us in.

Let us join together now. Amen!



Scripture Reading – Sept. 14, 2025 - for LCUCPC

Genesis 1 – NRSV Ue

Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

¹ When God began to create the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humans in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

May God’s spirit shape our understanding of these words.
And may they awaken in our hearts



EXTRA.....

2 *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude.*

² *On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.*

³ *So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

⁴ *These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.*