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Miigwech and blood memory: gratitude as a multi-lineage spiritual practice

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Hillary Raining
St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, USA

Abstract

In the last few years, scientists have discovered what indigenous communities have known for countless generations: that the emotional and physical lives of our ancestors will fundamentally affect our emotional and physical lives as well. Despite the increasingly evident effect that both trauma and/or gratitude can have on an individual (and by extension their offspring), there has been precious little research done on the effects of gratitude on future generations. This paper will seek to study the effect of gratitude as a deep spiritual practice that changes—not only those who practice it—but also the generations that follow. It will do so through the lenses of generational, psychological, and theological studies using the gratitude worldview and practices of the Ojibwa Native Americans as our entry point into the study of blood memory. It will also offer suggestions for church communities looking to reclaim gratitude as a spiritual practice in modern times drawing from the Church's institutional "blood memory."

Keywords

blood memory, gratitude, indigenous studies, ritual studies, spiritual practices and generational studies, trauma/PTSD

Introduction

To begin, I would like to start with the traditional act of gratitude that is customary in my tribe—to thank all of the elders and ancestors in my life who have made this work possible. Each endeavor for indigenous people begins with this act of ancestral gratitude to acknowledge the roles of those who have shaped us and our world. As we will note, that underpinning of multi-lineage gratitude is foundational to the concept of blood memory and the worldview of gratitude so common for Native American people.

In the last few years, scientists have discovered what indigenous communities have known for countless generations: that the emotional and physical lives of our ancestors

Corresponding author:
Hillary Raining, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, 226 Righters Mill Rd., Gladwyne, PA, USA.
Email: hillary.raining@gmail.com

will fundamentally affect our emotional and physical lives as well. Western science has taught us that PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and depression can be "passed down" by altering the genetic makeup of our offspring as well as by the negative parenting techniques that can be a result of these ailments.[1] At the same time, we have learned that the practice of gratitude can likewise have significant effects on the bodies, minds, and souls of those who engage in them. Yet, the effects of virtues, such as gratitude, have not been formally studied as a possible way to shape future generations in the same way trauma and depression have been.

This lack of theological and sociological study of the long-lasting effects of gratitude on future generations is sorely lacking in this era of loneliness, increased polarization, violence, and fear at epidemic proportions. What many indigenous communities, such as Native Americans, can teach us is the value of gratitude, not only in an individual's life, but (as they often teach) for seven generations beyond us. This understanding of gratitude would help connect and support communities of faith. The gift of inheriting blood memory from our ancestors is that we need only to look back, not simply at the trauma of our ancestors, but also the views and practices of gratitude that supported them in their hard times. We can pull from that tradition and build upon it. And, since we know that gratitude can be taught, why not have religions teach these rituals in such a manner that coming to church is seen as a way to participate in gratitude? Thus, what can be said about trauma can likewise be said about gratitude: if trauma can change the body, mind, and soul of an individual and that person's offspring, then so can gratitude. We inherit pieces of our ancestors' lives and are forever changed by them as well. The term for this multi-lineal virtue in the Native American community is "Blood Memory."

This paper will seek to study the effect of gratitude as a deeply spiritual practice that changes, not only those who practice it, but also the generations that follow. It will do so through the lens of generational, psychological, and theological studies using the gratitude worldview and practices of the Ojibwa Native Americans as our entry point into the study of blood memory. It will also offer suggestions for church communities looking to reclaim gratitude as a spiritual practice in modern times drawing from the Church's institutional "blood memory."

Trauma studies

Neuroscientific studies that focus on the multigenerational effects of emotions on offspring have been conducted primarily in the fields of PTSD, stress, and depression. Studies, like the ones performed by Nagy Youssef and his team on the effects of trauma on transgenerational DNA,[2] have found the tendency for these conditions to be genetically and interpersonally passed down to future generations is very high. Certainly, these behaviors might be linked with the way a person is fostered. It might be expected, for example, that if someone has a parent who suffered from these ailments, that child might

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[1] Nagy A Youssef, Laura Lockwood, Shaoyong Su, Guang Hao, and Bart P.F. Rutten, "The Effects of Trauma, with or without PTSD, on the Transgenerational DNA Methylation Alterations in Human Offsprings," *Brain Sciences* 8 (2018): 83.

[2] Youssef et al., "The Effects of Trauma," 8–16.

also suffer from them by the effects of this parenting. Yet, what makes these new studies so compelling is the discovery that the predisposition actually happens on a cellular level and can span at least three generations. Indeed,

> children of parents who had suffered extreme trauma have methylation modifications associated with trauma and PTSD. . . . Moreover, this PTSD risk [and the associated physical and psychological effects that accompany this condition—such as depression, higher stress reactions, and an increase likelihood of suicide] can be passed down from generation to generation.[3]

For example, if your grandmother suffered a traumatic event, the genes that she will pass on to your parent and subsequently to you will have been functionally altered, making her generational offspring more likely to suffer PTSD and/or depression. Thus, we inherit much more from our ancestors than just a receding hairline and blue eyes. It is clear that we can come to trauma by inheriting the effects of both nature and nurture. The role of our families and social structures can change our hormonal makeup as well. Important naturally occurring brain chemicals—such as oxytocin—begin their lifelong influence on behavior and cognition in the womb where maternal stress, depression, and trauma can change this hormonal development.[4] Oxytocin—the so-called “love hormone”—regulates and promotes the brain’s desire for close human contact. Generational and “environmental factors [such as trauma] can also influence the development of the oxytocin systems, which starts to develop in the womb and continues to develop after birth . . . Positive or negative experiences early in life can shape the oxytocin system.”[5] This change in oxytocin affects the ability to make close relational connections, and is correlated with higher rates of depression, suicide, anxiety disorders, PTSD, aggressive behavior, and drug use.[6]

Yet, if PTSD and depression may be the result of poor nurturing, then the reverse may be true as well. Mindfulness and gratitude practices can change the way we have been “hardwired” to handle stress and trauma—and those practices can be taught and fostered in our offspring. Bessel van der Kolm writes about the brain’s ability to heal when taught spiritual practices that help the body calm the trauma reaction triggered when the limbic system is stressed. He writes,

> The fundamental issue in resolving traumatic stress is to restore the proper balance between the rational and emotional [parts of the] brain, so that you can feel in charge of how you respond and how you conduct your life. . . . [T]he only way we can consciously access the emotional brain [and do “limbic system therapy”] is through self-awareness [and mindfulness], i.e. by activating the medial prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that notices what is going on inside us and thus allows us to feel what we are feeling. . . . Since emotional regulation is the critical

3 Youssef et al., “The Effects of Trauma,” 5.

4 Sarah Baracz and Femke Buisman-Pijlman, “How Childhood Trauma Changes Our Hormones, and Thus Our Mental Health, into Adulthood,” *The Conversation*, http://theconversation.com/how-childhood-trauma-changes-our-hormones-and-thus-our-mental-health-into-adulthood-84689 (accessed October 16, 2017).

5 Baracz and Buisman-Pijlman, “How Childhood Trauma Changes.”

6 Baracz and Buisman-Pijlman, “How Childhood Trauma Changes.”

> issue in managing the effects of trauma and neglect, it would make an enormous difference if teachers, army sergeants, parents, and mental health professionals were thoroughly schooled in emotional-intelligence [and mindfulness] techniques.[7]

Clearly, we should add religious communities to his list of groups that should teach this "life-and-future-generations-shaping" power of trauma healing. Rituals, prayers, breathing techniques, and meditation can help a person heal from trauma by tapping into the part of our brain that regulates emotion.[8] For example, we know that people who regularly participate in gratitude practices see incredible changes to their mental, physical, and emotional well-being.[9] Would not the power of such practices also have a lasting impact on the next generations? Indigenous teachings, as will be discussed later in this paper, suggest the answer is: yes.[10]

The ritual life-changing power of gratitude and an indigenous understanding

Gratitude is having something of a moment in modern scholarship. From intensive peer-reviewed studies, to Fortune 500 companies, to self-help gurus—everyone is lauding the effects of gratitude on physical, mental, and emotional health. The grateful often sleep better, have stronger hearts, and have enhanced empathy.[11] Those who practice gratitude are shown to have the ability to better handle stress, have longer and healthier lives, and have better interpersonal relationships. Thus, one might well say that "gratitude is a parent virtue of sorts—one that, when cultivated, gives rise to others. Gratitude has one broad purpose: to change what you do next."[12] Indeed, gratitude seems to be a key factor in:

> developing psychological flexibility and can have powerful effects on the functioning of our genes. For example, an epigenetic process called *methylation* interferes with your body's ability to read your genes. Harmful methylation can result from trauma, but learning flexibility skills [like gratitude practices] can undo part of the damage, and recent evidence shows that it does so by changing methylation. Flexibility processes literally alter how genes work. You can say it this way: If you learn to be less reactive to stress through the cultivation of flexibility pivots, the body starts turning off those reaction systems, including genetic expression switches that may have been originally thrown not by you but by your parents and grandparents.[13]

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[7] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 207–09.

[8] van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*.

[9] David Desteno, "Research Shows Gratitude Has a Drastically Positive Impact," *Sojourners* (2019), https://sojo.net/articles/research-shows-gratitude-has-drastically-positive-impact (accessed 22 February 2020).

[10] Steven Charleston, "The Global Tribe: Community in the 21st Century," *First Peoples Theology Journal* 4 (2004): 28–9.

[11] Amy Morin, "7 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude," *Psychology Today* (2015), https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-gratitude.

[12] David Desteno, "Research Shows."

[13] Steven C. Hayes, *A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters* (New York: Avery, 2019), 62.

This learning suggests that, we can help improve our lives, as well as our offspring and communities by taking seriously the spiritual virtue and power of gratitude.

Given all the transformational possibilities—communally, generationally, mentally, spiritually, and physically—it should come as no surprise that gratitude is far from being a new topic in the theological and ritual realms. Religions across all times and cultures have sought to make gratitude as a cornerstone of belief. (One obvious example from the Christian tradition is the Eucharist itself which not only literally means "thanksgiving" but tells us to "give God thanks and praise" as our call to action in the ritual. Eucharistic theology continually calls us to thanksgiving and to take the sacramental body and blood "in remembrance" of Christ and our unity in His body.) Yet, while we are considering how our religious rituals can and have shaped our practices, given the clear multigenerational impact of our ancestors' psychological flexibility on our current realities, it is equally important to revisit the rituals of our lineages. The "spiritual DNA" of our religions and our ancestors can have positive impacts on our futures if we see them as woven together to impact our lives. The rites and rituals around gratitude are as important to know about as our grandparents' trauma in understanding who we are and how we might like to strengthen our mental and spiritual health. Traditions and spiritual practices that foster (or fail to foster) gratitude stretch back into our individual and familial lineage and have an impact on us every day.

For example, belief in gratitude is the bedrock of many indigenous cultures such as Native Americans. We can see the depths of gratitude in every aspect of indigenous spirituality. For example, the Ojibwa word for "thank you" is "Miigwech." Yet, this translation does not fully encapsulate the depth of gratitude that is meant when it is used, especially in a ritual setting. In my studies with my tribe's traditional healer, I learned that "Miigwech" is used to symbolize a completeness and wholeness. Interestingly, this word only came into use after the tribes came in contact with Westerners, as they had never needed a word expressing "thank you" before. In Native American culture, it was assumed that everything in this world was already a gift from the Spirit so it was simply an act of fullest living to give what you have already received. As linguist James Vukelich says:

> What do you say about a culture that does not have a word for "thank you" in their vocabulary? . . . You discover a culture that . . . truly knows how to love. Truly knows how to be grateful. Truly acknowledges the sacred in their everyday life. . . . If they [the ancestral inheritors of the word "Miigwech"] can remember where this word comes from, they'll remember a time when we were always thankful, when we always had gratitude for everything we have been given and acknowledging that that gift was sacred.[14]

Clearly, the role of gratitude is central in the way of life described in this quote. Community is built around the idea that all should be shared as a mark of gratitude and completeness. It stands in sharp contrast to the fear and scarcity culture that is a hallmark of modern-day Western society.[15] We cannot be grateful and open when we are

[14] James Vukelich, "Ojibwa Word of the Day Miigwech ᒦᑵᒃ 'Thank you,'" YouTube video (October 21, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElcZ3hwfCm8.

[15] Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly, How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012).

constantly afraid that we will not be provided for. Thus, we see how practices of gratitude that can be fostered in a spiritual community can help open our eyes to the way God provides for our needs.

A key element is the role of community in gratitude practices—both in indigenous groups and religious groups. An individual has gratitude for the gifts God has bestowed and then gives out of that gratitude to others. Rituals around harvest, rites of passage, even daily prayer can be seen as being held together by gratitude as a kind of spiritual glue. Rituals and gratitude practices survive and thrive because, "they contribute to social cohesion that is they strengthen the bonds between community members by producing emotional alignment (shared emotions), fostering collective identities, and promoting solidarity."[16] This adhesive power of gratitude is especially important in facing one of the greatest blocks to gratitude—loneliness. Currently, we are in a major loneliness epidemic caused by social distancing, the lack of deep friendships, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has sent a majority of people into their own homes for safety. And this loneliness epidemic is not just a problem for individuals, it is a major communal health problem. According to Former Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, "it turns out that loneliness is associated with a reduction in your lifespan that is as severe as the lifespan you see with smoking 15 cigarettes a day," he said. "We evolve to be social creatures. . . . So when you're disconnected, you're in a stress state. When that happens chronically, it can have a profound impact on your health."[17] Now, more than ever in recent history, the church must use gratitude as a way to bring people closer to one another turning toward ancient rituals in new ways. This need for connection is especially true as we watch church communities taking advantages of new technologies following the onset of the COVID-19 virus and the social isolation that comes along with it.

The role of gratitude for the church's future drawing from past—guidance from our ancestors

> Church communities have a unique opportunity to be a prime source of gratitude training in a time when it is desperately needed since they are communities gathered to practice shared virtues. In the Episcopal tradition, we have beautiful prayers and liturgies (such as the Eucharist and the Litany of Thanksgiving[18]) that can help congregants foster the virtue in their lives. "These Eucharistic prayers being deeply rooted in the earlier Jewish tradition gives thanks to God by recalling God's great acts such as creation, deliverance, and promise (anamnesis). This remembrance, when coupled with the request to God to do something similar now in our time

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[16] Dimitris Xygalatas, "Do Rituals Promote Social Cohesion?" in *The Cognitive Science of Religion: A Methodological Introduction to Key Empirical Studies*, ed. D. Jason Slone and William M. McCorkle Jr. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 163.

[17] "Former surgeon general sounds the alarm on the loneliness epidemic," CBS News (October 19, 2017), https://www.cbsnews.com/news/loneliness-epidemic-former-surgeon-general-dr-vivek-murthy/ (accessed February 22, 2020).

[18] Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, 1986), 836–37.

(epiclesis) are the central organs of the anatomy of Jewish and Christian prayer."[19] Additionally, following the examples of our Native American brothers and sisters, it too can draw upon its corporate memory to express gratitude in a fuller way. For example, for over 400 years, the Eucharistic prayers of the Anglican Missal were prayers of Doxology or praise only. They named God and God's actions, but did not help us shape our prayers in gratitude. Yet, this neglected a long history of Eucharistic prayers being primarily about thanksgiving. "What is true . . . is that Eucharistic prayer seems to have begun with thanksgiving or praise, expressed by one or more number of praise verbs, and [only then] to have moved from that proclamatory section to a supplication."[20] Thus, the 20th century liturgical movement reached back into a deep historical past and restored language of gratitude to modern Eucharistic prayers. When we celebrate our history of corporate gratitude, we can help shape the worshiping generations for years to come.

It is likewise very important for individuals to begin to reach back into their own multi-lineage background and explore patterns and behaviors that may need reinstating. In the Native American community, many ancestors were not taught the rites and rituals of their people. Due to a systematic and widespread "whitewashing" and eradication of First Nation people and customs, many of our grandparents were not able to be openly native without being labeled a "savage." Many of these oppressive and destructive regulations from the government were reinforced by religious institutions who were trying to "kill the Indian to save the man" as the terrible expression went. So, it should be of no great surprise that many people are disconnected from their own ancestral heritage which, given all we know about multi-lineage effects of trauma, can only hinder a person's receptivity to gratitude and self-understanding. Despite this unimaginable trauma, Native Americans held onto their faith through thanksgiving and hope practiced in community, proving that rituals and religious gatherings can be places where that generational damage is reversed with prayers, song, and fellowship. Church communities would do well to explore blood memory especially as it connects patterns of ritual in indigenous communities as a gateway for future healing.

Examining such a ritual can help us understand the power of embracing this healing. At our 2019 Powwow and spiritual gathering, members of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians (Ojibwa) gathered for a traditional time of sharing and storytelling. The gathering took place from sunrise to set in a ceremonial lodge oriented "so that the lodge can have four doorways so that the spirits [and ancestors] can enter from each of the Four Sacred Directions. Only the eastern doorway [as the direction of the sunrise which symbolizes new beginnings and resurrection in the church] was to be used by humans."[21] Upon entering, every person was to place sacred tobacco—one of the four sacred medicines of the Native Americans—on the holy fire

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[19] Kevin J. Moroney (Associate Professor in the H. Boone Porter Chair of Liturgics Director of the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, General Theological Seminary), interviewed by Hillary Raining, New York, NY, January 2020.

[20] Thomas J. Talley, "Eucharistic Prayers, Past, Present and Future," in *Revising the Eucharist: Groundwork for the Anglican Communion*, ed. David R. Holeton (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1995), 7.

[21] Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 85.

as an “offering of thanksgiving,”[22] thus grounding the entire event in a spirit of gratitude. Like many ritualized Ojibwa gatherings, people were invited to speak “their truth” by passing around a totem stick with the head of an eagle on the top. The eagle is used as a symbol of truth because of a legend that holds that the eagle intervened on behalf of humanity with God. This feathered brother is said to be able to look right into the sun and as such, no one can lie when the eye of the eagle gazes upon them. To honor the eagle in this way is to hold gratitude for its relationship to us.[23] As people told their stories and messages, they always began by thanking their elders (marking their understanding of blood memory) and would always talk of the need to be grateful as a way of life. Many of these stories were ancient myths or stories of their own relatives and tribal elders. The gathering was closed with chants of thanksgiving and a call for peace and unity across the world. Doyle Turner describes the effects of such a gathering by writing of similar Ojibwa gathering:

> On through the night it went, timeless beauty, haunting harmony, wonderful words of faith and encouragement, reaching far back, gathering of past into present through the memories of the oldest, saints remembered, accolades given for keeping tradition alive through even the leanest of spiritual times. We heard words of hope for tomorrow tinged with uneasiness that it may all end, but tonight is a timeless prayer lifted to God in pulsating, wavering, hopeful harmony. We are together now, tonight, all is right with the world.[24]

If religious communities were able to create such ritualistic spaces for ancient gratitude-sharing, members would grow in gratitude and community. Indeed, everyone who was welcomed into that space was told that everyone was grateful for their presence, and was considered a member of the tribe held together by that ancient glue of gratitude. It was understood that the blood that flowed through our veins was also carrying the spirit of those who had gone before.

Typically in Episcopal churches, services are conducted via the Book of Common Prayer. One of the very first directives listed in the book has to do with the principal act of gratitude, the Holy Eucharist. Immediately following the Preface it states: “The Holy Eucharist, the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord’s Day and other major Feasts, and Daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as set forth in this Book, are the regular services appointed for public worship in the Church.”[25] Built into this rite is a theological and liturgical concept that mirrors the gratitude for ancestors of Native Americans—the Church’s cosmic understanding of the Communion of Saints. In the Eucharist, Episcopalians hold fast to the belief that all those who have gone before surround the communion table joining together heaven and earth. The saints who have gone before

[22] Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 85.

[23] Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 82.

[24] Doyle Tuner, “Prayer Songs of the Ojibwe Singers,” *First Peoples Theology Journal* 6 (2012): 22.

[25] Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church*, 13.

join the saint "below" in gratitude for God. This unity with heaven and earth is reflected in the Sanctus where we pray, "Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name . . ."[26] Offering our "sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise," helps us join with the Holy Spirit to create this cosmic "tribe" that stretches beyond time and space. The blood of the chalice becomes a blood memory all its own by gathering every member of the Body of Christ into one.

Yet, in too many of these "principal acts" of corporate thanksgiving, the priest offers up the words of thanksgiving on behalf of the congregation.[27] In experience, this can have the opposite, unintended effect of making congregants feel like spectators. Unlike the powwow gathering, described above, there is very little space for worshipers to share their own ancestral wisdom. Yes, the service contains the stories of the faith and the Eucharistic prayer itself tells the story of redemption in Jesus, but not the stories of the faithful assembled today. What indigenous rituals can teach us is that we each have wisdom of gratitude to share given our lived experiences and blood memory. What is needed are ritualized places where those can be shared, heard, and internalized as an exercise of practicing the virtue.

Similarly, we are in a time of non-storytelling and non-myth creation. The late Joseph Campbell, leading scholar in the field of mythology (who often credited Native American myths with his love of the subject and for being some of the richest and most well developed in the world) pointed to the power of myth making for a society. In his view, culture and community were shaped around the stories and rituals they shared. Of critical importance are the tales of creation which are fundamentally stories of being grateful for the interconnectedness of the world and humanity with God. Yet, Campbell also spoke about the dangers of living in a time (such as now) when those basic spiritual building blocks are removed. He was quoted saying,

> Without myths and rituals society today becomes marked by destructive and violent acts by young people who don't know how to behave in civilized society . . . [They are left to work out the meaning of life on their own]. . . . [K]ids [who are not given myths and rituals] have their own gangs and their own initiations and their own morality. . . . [T]hey are dangerous because their own laws are not those of the [community]. They have not been initiated into a society. . . . What we have today is a demythologized world.[28]

When we are not telling stories, we are not making meaning. Nor are we passing on practices that help develop virtues.

Yet, as the above powwow story highlights, a central tenet of Native American ritual is telling the stories of our people and our own family members. The creation stories of the Ojibwa, for example, often talk about the gift of creation and the need to be grateful for every aspect of life. This practice of storytelling is even treated seasonally (not unlike the liturgical telling of certain scriptural stories), with the highpoint of the storytelling

[26] *Book of Common Prayer*, 362.
[27] David Holeton, *Renewing the Anglican Eucharist* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1995), 7.
[28] Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 8–9.

season starting around the winter solstice. For the Ojibwa, one reason for this seasonal nature is that, "many traditional stories contain animal characters. To be respectful, people waited until the winter when animals hibernate or become less active so they cannot hear themselves being talked about."[29] Thus, storytelling was a way to remember our place in God's creation. Further, each story was treated as something to be thankful for. "To have a storyteller tell you a story is like receiving a gift. To be respectful, a gift of tobacco is offered to the storyteller before the story begins. The storyteller will often take the tobacco outside and place it on the earth as an offering to the spirits of the story,"[30] again showing how the gratitude in the details story and in the telling help to tie in the gift of community and creation.

In light of the deep importance of myth to a culture's practice of gratitude, we should once again turn to examining the Eucharist. In some ways, the Eucharist does offer a place of sharing the central stories of the faith in the "Liturgy of the Word" portion. Each service contains in this first section several scripture readings and, presumably, the preacher offers a meaning—making sermon based on those passages. Given the right preacher, these can be helpful tools in passing on virtuous wisdom. And, as mentioned, the Eucharistic prayer itself contains the fullness of Jesus' story (and thus all of creation's story) of union and salvation. Yet, the same concern made above about the lack of space for congregants to respond can be made here. The Liturgy of the Word is not participatory enough to allow people to create their own meaning-making stories. Yes, the stories (especially the Gospel) are often surrounded by ceremonial songs and actions. However, the storyteller/preacher is never thanked as a part of the ritual. And worse still, people are never invited to give their own stories of gratitude. Christians believe that we are a part of God's ongoing salvation history in the world. Yet, our canon and fresh expressions have been limited to the words on the page and the sermons from the pulpit. To take our cues from our ancestors, faith communities would do well to create congregational opportunities for storytelling and creation in their services. Doing so would allow people to practice gratitude.

Finding a place for people to share their own stories within the Eucharist would also be a chance for the Church to again call upon its own "institutional blood memory." As Thomas J. Talley reminds us, "from Cappadocia to Edessa by ca. 300, the Eucharistic prayer celebrated in a Christian form the 'triad'. . ., the beginning of sacred history in Creation, the critical midpoint of that history in the Revelation of God in Christ and his inauguration of Redemption, and the future of the Covenant people moved by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit toward the consummation of sacred history when that Redemption will be fulfilled."[31] Here we see that the Eucharist itself was never intended to be a service that just remembers a story from antiquity. The Eucharist grafts us into Christ's story-making our stories a part of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the present and into the

[29] Dennis Zotigh, "The Winter Solstice Begins a Season of Storytelling and Ceremony," The Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (December 19, 2017), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2017/12/20/american-indian-winter-solstice/ (accessed February 22, 2020).

[30] Zotigh, "The Winter Solstice Begins."

[31] Thomas J. Talley, "The Literary Structure of the Eucharistic Prayer," *Worship* 58 (1984): 419.

future. Far from "reducing the concept [memorization] to an expression of temporal distance from the redemptive act [or merely seeing the rite as simple], 'memory' i.e. looking back to a distant event, the ancient church understood it as an act of holy anamnesis. We can at least be quite clear that the idea 'keep in mind' [as a translation for anamnesis] is a dangerous vacuity."[32] Pulling on this ancient liturgical understanding will point us to create spaces in our services to invite current storytelling and gratitude sharing as we discern where the Holy Spirit is currently moving. Perhaps the greatest barrier to incorporating communal gratitude sharing in the pattern of Native Americans will be a practical one: time. Making space for sharing does not fit neatly into a compact Eucharistic.

Faith communities may do well to consider a time for gratitude practices in place of the sermon. For example, on one Sunday, people could be invited to share with their neighbor in the pew (or even better, someone they do not know well) a story of something they are grateful for from God that week. Then, their partner can name these stories as prayers to the whole community. Similarly, these could be used as part of the Prayers of the People. Offering space for people to name before God where they are grateful in their life for God's blessings. There are opportunities for creativity as well with recording video messages of gratitude and prayer to be share with others during online worship when social distancing makes being together physically impossible.

Finally, the indigenous gratitude practices always point back to an abiding understanding that we are a part of creation and are to treat it with gratitude and respect. This love of Creator and creation moves a person to acts of love and thanksgiving in the world. The Rev. Mark Loyal describes that cyclical process thusly:

> The soul of this Indian attributed creation to a being able to create and bring the wonders around him into being. This soul developed a deep awe for this great mystery. This awe of his soul led to a deep respect for all creation. . . . The Indian soul perceived that the Creator was helping him and so his soul developed a deep appreciation for his gifts of help. His soul was filled with thanksgiving, and in order to express it, the soul reached out in sharing with others the things he received from the hands of the Creator. . . . His soul could not hold back, but had to express his thankfulness though sharing all that he had received with those around him.[33]

Unlike so much of Western culture, Native American spirituality does not look at the creation as something to be dominated, harvested, and bent to our will. Creation is seen as a gift. Thus how we treat it and share in its abundance should be nothing less than grateful stewardship.

Christianity is a religion rooted in the Incarnation—that is the belief that the Creator stepped into creation and became a creature himself. Through Jesus, all of creation is understood to be reconciled to God. So it is ironic that our church communities do little to remind Christians of their role to be caretakers of this planet. An example of this lack could be seen at the 2018 General Convention of The Episcopal Church. Members of the Indigenous Ministries of The Episcopal Church testified on behalf of Resolution

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[32] Thomas J. Talley, "The Eucharistic Prayer: Directions for Development," *Worship* 51 (1977): 323.

[33] Mark Loyal, "Soul of the Indian," *First Peoples Theology Journal* 1 (2000): 85.

2018-C030. This resolution asked the Convention to add a new promise to the Baptismal Covenant asking, “Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?”[34] Unfortunately, this resolution failed to even make it out of committee. Instead, the issue was referred to be considered by the task force as one among many others in their work of prayer book revision. A lack of awe and wonder in our liturgies and rituals will lead to a lack of gratitude for God’s creation. Sadly, we are already seeing the devastating effects that can have. Churches need to foster communities that embrace the Native American view of the planet and our thankful response to its blessings.

Conclusion

Churches who lean into that deep interconnectedness that gratitude can help build communities that are connected in gratitude and faith. Many Native American spiritual leaders are calling for such a theological and liturgical emphasis in the Christian tradition. For example, Episcopal Bishop and past Dean of Episcopal Divinity School Steven Charleston wrote about the Church as the Global Tribe in the 21st century as benefiting from the blood memory of native peoples:

> One of the greatest remaining reservoirs of [religious] adaptive community is within the indigenous cultures of this planet. Our goal should be to nurture and extend the vision of these communities. . . . The promise of the global tribe is the legacy of North America’s indigenous civilization. It is the alternative to fear, conflict and oppression. It is a possibility tested and proven in the experience of Native communities. It is an option for a culture that would practice the simple lessons of a spirituality that not only endured the worst [trauma] that globalization has to offer, but grown stronger in spite of it.[35]

In other words, infusing our religious traditions with the deeply ingrained gratitude rituals of our ancestors, will help us also heal from our traumas. We will grow by practicing their pattern of becoming people who can transform trauma into peace.

There is no question that the virtue of gratitude has the power to transform our lives—and not just ours, but the lives of those who come after us. The good news is that gratitude is a practice that can be fostered and cultivated. The even better news is that, as Native American society can show us, our communities can also be shaped by our gratitude by taking us out of a scarcity mindset and lifting our hearts heavenward. We are given many gifts—and some sorrows—through our ancestral blood memory, all of which can help us on our path to deeper spiritual growth. If we are to represent Christ, we must look back to our traditional practices of gratitude and forward to a future where we live in a world governed not by the virtues of trauma and fear, but of hope and gratitude. In doing so we can change ourselves and future generations. If our trauma can be passed

[34] The Archives of the Episcopal Church, RESOLUTION NO. 2018-C030: “Proposed Baptismal Covenant Language,” https://www.episcopalarchives.org/sites/default/files/gc_resolutions_2018/2018-C030.pdf (accessed March 3, 2020).

[35] Steven Charleston, “The Global Tribe: Community in the 21st Century,” 28–9.

down, so can our gratitude. Let us build places of spiritual community that can foster a deeply healing and transforming gratitude. Miigwech!

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Author biography

The Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining currently serves as the Rector of St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church in Glawyne, PA. She is also a publish author including several books and scholarly writing. She is also the founder of the online Wellness and Spirituality community called The Hive (www.thehiveapiary.com) where she often writes and preaches on the topic of gratitude. As a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Hillary recently spent a portion of her sabbatical studies tracing what indigenous people commonly call “Blood Memory”—that which we inherit from our ancestors that goes beyond genetic makeup. These studies also took her to Ireland and Scotland to further her work in Celtic Christianity. She has studied, led retreats, and lectured all over the world and her areas of expertise include trauma, ritual studies, reconciliation, yogic wisdom, and the teachings of Brené Brown whose work she is certified in. Hillary credits the spiritual practice of gratitude as literally saving her life in a time of deep depression and would be honored for the opportunity to add to the field of theological scholarship on the topic. You can often find her tending her bees, teaching a yoga class, hiking, and hanging out with her dear husband and teen daughter.