



**INDIGENOUS PATHWAYS**



# INDIGENOUS VISIONS OF LENT

A Journey through Lent with the  
Indigenous Pathways Family

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**THANK YOU FOR JOINING US ON THIS  
JOURNEY THROUGH LENT**

Indigenous Pathways envisions a better future for Indigenous peoples around the globe. Our family of nonprofit organizations is bringing that dream to life through the work of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community and iEmergence. Rooted in Indigenous values and framed by our faith as followers of the Jesus Way, we offer our own stories as a way for others to find their paths as well.

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For Indigenous peoples, Lent  
is about the deeper  
realisation that we are  
entering into and identifying  
with and participating with  
Jesus in one of the most  
important and significant  
initiation ceremonies that he  
experienced.

-  
Ray Minniecon

I N D I G E N O U S P A T H W A Y S . C O M

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# 1 CHAPTER

## INTRODUCTION

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## **SHARI RUSSELL**

Shari Russell, director of NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community, is treaty status Saulteaux (Anishinaabe) from Yellow Quill First Nation in Saskatchewan. Shari is married to Robert, and together they have three adult sons: Charles, Gavin and Brannon. They currently reside in Hamilton, Ontario, with two of their sons, while the third lives in Calgary, Alberta. Shari is an ordained Salvation Army officer and has been part of the NAIITS community since 2002, serving on its board.

# INTRODUCTION

## SHARI RUSSELL

The season of Lent is an opportunity for us to reflect on the life, teachings, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of our Jesus. This year, we invite you to join us as we journey through a series of inspirational reflections by our Indigenous Pathways community around the globe. These reflections are based on the Scriptures of the season and on the theme for this year's NAIITS symposium being held June 6 to 8, 2024, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota: "Dreaming Our World Home: The Roots and Role of Visions in Creating Indigenous Futures / an Indigenous Future." Elders, faculty, students and members of our community invite us to share and reflect on the significance of Lent for us as Indigenous peoples.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to be in my home community for a Rain Dance ceremony hosted by my cousin. The Rain Dance, sometimes referred to as the Sun Dance or Thirst Dance, is a sacred ceremony among many Plains First Nations,

often involving the piercing of flesh. This was the first time I had ever participated in this ceremony as it was outlawed for many decades and condemned by the church. I sat with my cousins, who helped guide and occasionally translated for me; I did not understand what was being communicated as it was solely in Nakawemowin. As I watched and listened, I marveled at the imagery before me: an Intercessor who had prepared for years not only to offer his body in sacrifice, but also to continue to care holistically for the community.

Before the Sun Dance ceremony itself commences, there are many days of preparatory fasting and prayer. The four days of ceremony are intense. They begin with preparing the site and building the Rain Dance lodge; purifying and consecrating oneself in the Sweat Lodge; and prayerfully interceding and faithfully dancing for the four days, with breaks only granted by the leader. The ceremony then continues

with care for the well-being of the community, not only spiritually, but also practically through providing physical nourishment for everyone in attendance.

This ceremony is a visible reminder to me of the sacrifice of our Great Intercessor, Jesus. As I think of what Jesus has done on the cross, I am reminded that this required intense preparation of body, mind and spirit. This preparation also included purification, consecration and renewal.

These weeks of Lent are an opportunity for us to prepare mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. There may be times when we rethink our understanding of humanity and treasure, as Micky ScottBey Jones and Danny Zacharias offer valuable insights. Times when we seek restoration, mercy and grace,

explained by Hannah Chapman in the gift of *muru*. There may be times when we journey to the desert to “learn the deep lessons” that Ray Minniecon shares.

As the Sun Dance reminds us, this encompasses more than an individual experience – it also includes the care and well-being of our community, including the land and waters of our earth. In these next few weeks, as we journey together with the Indigenous Pathways community and prepare our hearts and minds during this Lenten season, may we also reflect on the well-being and care for our community of creation. And may we experience the freedom that Jesus brings in the resurrection as we “worship God in complete freedom and acceptance and dance like David,” or as our Elder Adrian Jacobs did.



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# 2

**C H A P T E R**

ASH WEDNESDAY

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## **DANNY ZACHARIAS**

Danny Zacharias is a Cree-Anishinaabe and Austrian man originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba (Treaty One territory), with ancestors also residing in Treaty Two, Treaty Three and Treaty Five territories. He lives in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia) with his wife and four children in Wolfville, where he is associate dean and professor of New Testament Studies at Acadia Divinity College. He also serves as adjunct faculty for NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community.

# HEAVEN AND EARTH

## DANNY ZACHARIAS

STOP COLLECTING TREASURES FOR YOUR OWN BENEFIT ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST EAT THEM AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL THEM. INSTEAD, COLLECT TREASURES FOR YOURSELVES IN HEAVEN, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DON'T EAT THEM AND WHERE THIEVES DON'T BREAK IN AND STEAL THEM. WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. — MATTHEW 6:19–21

Part of the Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday this year comes from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus' reputation as a healer and holy man is established as Jesus indiscriminately gives of himself to the people who are in need. Jesus has established himself as a wisdomkeeper worthy of being listened to. He has the pedigree of a king (Matthew 1:1–17); his birth stands in opposition to the imperial powers (Matthew 2:1–12); he has identified with John's renewal movement and gone on his vision quest (Matthew

3:13–4:11). Following this, he has freely given of his power of healing. It is these stories that establish him as a wisdomkeeper, someone who will be sought out for his teaching. He teaches from a mountain, as "mountains are sites of spiritual power in Native tradition. They are signposts to the presence of God. ... Mountains are spirit-filled," writes Steven Charleston in "The Four Vision Quests of Jesus."

The middle section of the sermon, where today's passage is found, serves to reinforce the previous teachings, but does so by way of lessons from life and creation. In the case of treasures, Jesus points to the realities of the spirit world, called "heaven" or "the heavens" by Jesus in the Gospels. This intangible, but no less real, sphere is inextricably linked to our embodied existence.

Unfortunately, Western (Greek) dualism has wreaked havoc on western theologies and, subsequently, our reading of the Scriptures. All notions of heaven are

frequently cast both into the future as well as away from the earth and, consequently, away from our embodied existence. But the Scriptures do not envision heaven as a body-less existence floating upon the clouds and playing harps. Heaven and earth are realms of existence that we can simultaneously occupy. The kingdom of heaven was present in the ministry of John the Baptizer and was present in the life and teachings of Jesus (Matthew 11:12). All of Jesus' many teachings and parables about the kingdom of heaven were not about some future hope, but about present realities.

As an Indigenous man, conversant with the teachings of his people, Jesus understood the realities of the spirit world and how this (mostly) unseen reality is all around us, always at work,

always interacting with our embodied existence. It is into this worldview that Jesus encourages us to store up treasures in heaven. To not invest ourselves in the purely material riches that are fleeting and that are ever defined by the societies around us.

Think of how much effort is exerted by humanity towards that which will eventually fade away. But moth and rust cannot eat love. Thieves cannot steal away from us the honouring of our ancestors and what they have done for us. They cannot destroy a life lived in a good way by following the teachings of Jesus. These treasures cannot be held in your hand and cannot be traded on the stock market. But they are no less real, and their value is vastly superior for you and for your community.



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# 3

**C H A P T E R**

**PALM SUNDAY**

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## **MICKY SCOTTBHEY JONES**

Micky ScottBey Jones is a visionary leader in the areas of emotional intelligence, spiritual accompaniment and movement chaplaincy. She holds a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies from NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community through Portland Seminary and is trained in Kingian nonviolence. Micky is a certified and accredited Enneagram teacher and transformative leadership coach in the social sector. Find her at [mickyscottbeyjones.com](http://mickyscottbeyjones.com).

# NO 'BUTS' ABOUT IT

## MICKY SCOTTBEY JONES

The passage from this year's reading from the Psalms for Palm Sunday — Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 — begins and ends with this encouragement:

O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, FOR HE IS GOOD, FOR HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.

Between that repeated phrase, the writer has more praise for Creator and all the good things Creator has done and offers blessings back to Creator for blessings recounted and requested. However, there is something absent from this celebration of Creator's goodness and blessing... the word "but."

I've heard people say that everything you write after the word "but" in a sentence nullifies what comes before. It's as if to say, "yeah, yeah, yeah, *but* here's what I really wanted to say." We often say we want to focus on the goodness of Creator and on all of our blessings, yet we actually end up focused on what we

think is bad, unlovable or unfixable about ourselves. It's as if we want to remind Creator that we might not be worthy of love and blessing, no matter how good Creator is.

I recently rediscovered my adolescent journals, where I kept my most intimate thoughts and many, many pages of prayers to Creator. Like the psalmist in this passage, I thanked Creator for all the blessings in my life. I wrote pages and pages of reflections on what I thought I was understanding from the text I was diligently studying at 14, 15, 20 years old. BUT — and it is a big BUT — as I poured through the pages that reflected my young mind wrestling with the teaching of my pastors, my own average adolescent struggles and my identity formation, I noticed my pattern of constantly contrasting Creator's goodness with what I saw in myself: one who is bad, unworthy, even evil. With every mention of Creator's goodness, there was always a "but" to focus on me.

I look back now with deep compassion. I wonder what those years would have been like if I had focused on the steadfast love of Creator without a “but,” without a reminder of how evil I must be in contrast. Many years later, thanks to Indigenous theologians and mentors, I learned that our understanding of love doesn’t have to start from unworthiness. Creator does not need for us to be evil for Creator to be good. And the even better news is that Creator planted goodness within each one of us that we can nurture and grow.

As we move into this final week of reflection before Easter, let us focus on Creator

and the steadfast love, blessings and goodness that are revealed to us in all creation — including ourselves. Might we be drawn to being more steadfast in our love, more of a blessing to others, more activated toward goodness if we keep the focus on reflecting those things back to Creator instead of insisting we are everything *but* what we see in Creator?

Let us move into this most Holy Week without a “but,” holding both our humanity and the goodness and blessings of Creator as we prepare for the celebration of one of the greatest displays of steadfast love in the Jesus Way traditions.



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## CHAPTER

# 4

## MAUNDY THURSDAY

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## **HANNAH CHAPMAN**

Hannah Chapman (Tūwharetoa/Te Whānau a Apanui) is a cultural strategy consultant and lives in Auckland, New Zealand, with her three children. She is one of the founders of iEmergence.

# GOOD GIFTS

## HANNAH CHAPMAN

Last year, I attended the opening of an art exhibition, “Muru,” that explored themes of colonisation. The exhibition featured multiple Māori artists, including Nigel Borell, Charles and Janine Williams, and Sir Haare Williams KNZM JP, a distinguished, 89-year-old writer and artist. Sir Haare’s telling of *muru* has altered how I dream and think about a future for our people.

Muru is a *tikanga* (custom, lore) that can be applied when a person commits a serious offence against someone else. It embraces

principles of *mana* and *whanaungatanga*. Mana is the inherent dignity of every person. It also has a spiritual dimension and can be earned through one’s actions. Whanaungatanga is the interconnected relationships between created things and our Creator. It is inherently reciprocal.

Muru recognises that an individual’s offence doesn’t just violate the victim’s mana, but it also violates their own and that of both families. Consequently, whanaungatanga is damaged.



Photo by Hannah Chapman of “Muru” (wall mural) by Sir Haare Williams, Nigel Borell, Charles Williams, Janine Williams, 2023. Not to be copied.

Muru is initiated by the victim and/or their families. Their chosen consequence must give the offender the opportunity to restore mana and, in doing so, heal and reconcile whanaungatanga. This is monitored by the community. The aim of muru is not to punish, but to restore. It offers mercy and grace.

I've been pondering how Jesus is like muru. He is the one who was laid down, offering a means by which we might be saved through mercy and grace and reconciled to God, creation and each other.

BUT GOD, WHO IS RICH IN MERCY, OUT OF THE GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD THROUGH OUR TRESPASSES, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST, BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED. — EPHESIANS 2:4-5

Whanaungatanga is restored.

In muru, God reveals a glimpse of God's self. Such revelations have been

concealed through colonisation and are being forgotten. But, as Sir Haare and the artists of the "Muru" exhibition shared, they are still there for remembering, reclaiming, reimagining and restoring. We needn't wait for some future state to do so. Whether the transgression be against individuals, groups of people, other created beings or the life force of our waterways or forests, muru offers a pathway of mercy and grace that restores us back to each other, bringing life.

The "Muru" exhibition included a stunning wall mural that tells a story of the Waikato people, from the arrival of their ancestors on the left to colonisation in the middle. But it doesn't end there – it continues to the right, with a dream that muru can catalyse. When we honour Creator's intended design for us as Indigenous people and use the good gifts Creator gave us, gifts like muru, life and peace can come to our communities and lands. Jesus shows up, and we are made alive.



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# 5

**CHAPTER**

**GOOD FRIDAY**

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## **RAY MINNIECON**

Ray Minniecon is a descendent of the Kabi Kabi and Gurang Gurang nations of southeast Queensland. Ray and his wife Sharon have a 40-year ministry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families across Australia. In 2022, they received honorary doctorates from NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community, where they are Elders. Ray is pastor of Scarred Tree Indigenous Ministries, honorary Indigenous minister at St. John's Anglican Church in Glebe, Australia, and a member of the Indigenous Pathways board.

# JESUS IN THE DESERT

## RAY MINNIECON

I love the desert! The desert has always been my greatest instructor. I consider the desert to be one of the world's greatest universities. Its classrooms are so vast. Its starry "ceilings" are so high. Its "walls" are so wide. In the desert classroom, I am alone. The comforts of modern society are stripped away. I am left with the solitude and quietness of the desert. It energizes me to look inside myself and find my deeper inner soul — my character, strength and resilience. I have no need to access any external resources or materials to support me.

The desert teaches me how to intensify and deepen my personal spirituality. For me, a desert educational experience is a like a personal initiation ceremony. In the desert, my innermost being and eyes are opened to new, deeper spiritual revelations and teachings that are unfathomable to me and are not accessible nor available through any human institution of learning or religious teachings. The desert experience is deeply personal.

Deeply intimate. Deeply enriching. Deeply powerful. Deeply cleansing. And deeply authoritative. The desert initiation experience is one of my greatest joys because the desert is truly our greatest educator of spiritual truths, spiritual insights, qualities and attributes. It is feasible to sit within the desert classroom and learn from the teachings of the desert as my professor and be so oblivious to any type of human need or desire.

Jesus knows this truth! After his public baptismal ceremony, he is "led by the Spirit into the desert" (Matthew 4:1). He now needs to enter a more deeply personal initiation, which will take him on a deep, internal, intimate journey in preparation for his own self-discovery and reconnection with his divinity. He understands the deep authority and deep lessons that he needs to learn. He is rediscovering himself in the university of the desert. He must submit himself to the authority of its teachings and disciplines to rediscover

his human connection with all creation and his divinity. It's in this deeper self-discovery and self-realisation of who he is that he regenerates the power and authority he requires to carry out the ministry and work he has been called to perform as the Son of God. Adam was created and fashioned in a garden as the first human. Jesus, the Messiah, was "fashioned" in a desert and becomes the only Son of God, the Saviour of the world. The Messiah!

In the garden, Adam and Eve's temptation took place within the most luxurious environment that could ever be created. They had the opportunity to explore and enjoy all that creation provided. They had need of nothing! Until they were tempted in the Garden of Eden. In contrast, the temptation of Jesus at the end of his initiation ceremony in the desert seems so miniscule and inconsequential. Jesus was taught in the university of the desert. He experienced and absorbed the inner potency, the inner power and authority in spiritual education and training from this vast classroom in the university of the desert.

This type of desert experience and knowledge is so well understood and known by Indigenous peoples around the world. We understand the deep importance of initiation ceremonies for our youth. We are taught the principles of deep listening and thinking in the desert university. We know that appropriate initiation ceremonies are a vital part of the development of a person's spiritual maturity to help them become the mighty warriors and leaders of their peoples.

The specific practices and customs associated with Lent may vary among Christian denominations, with the overarching themes of repentance, self-examination and drawing closer to God. Sometimes, that includes abstaining from certain foods, such as meat, or even specific meals.

For Indigenous peoples, Lent is about the deeper realisation that we are entering into and identifying with and participating with Jesus in one of the most important and significant initiation ceremonies that he experienced. We know and understand the importance of this

initiation fully. We know that Lent is not just about the practice of fasting, prayer and penance or giving up some petty habit. For Indigenous peoples, we are re-entering personally into an ancient Indigenous initiation ceremony that Jesus experienced in preparation for ministry.

During this Lenten period, let us reimagine and learn the deep lessons from the university of the desert to overcome the temptations of our present challenges (see Matthew 4:1-11). Those temptations of Jesus reveal three of our greatest challenges. The first temptation is based in land. We know that the land is the provider of all our food. The exploitation of our sacred lands must cease! Paul said it clearly in Romans 8:22: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." We feel our sacred Mother's pain. Exploiting and manipulating our land will not turn stones into bread to feed us (Matthew 4:2).

The second and third temptations are based in public power, dominance and supremacy. Let us remind ourselves to be aware of the

seduction, power and influence of the world we live in, especially the political power and social media impacts in our world. Their influences have not changed our current political situation or brought about true justice for Indigenous peoples.

As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:

FOR OUR STRUGGLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE POWERS OF THIS DARK WORLD AND AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY REALMS. THEREFORE, PUT ON THE FULL ARMOUR OF GOD, SO THAT WHEN THE DAY OF EVIL COMES, YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND YOUR GROUND, AND AFTER YOU HAVE DONE EVERYTHING, TO STAND.

Jesus taught us three great lessons from the university of the desert as we approach the Lenten season, which culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let's remind ourselves about the lessons of Lent and what it means personally and for all Indigenous peoples:

1. God's Word is enough for all our needs, our protection, sustenance and maturity.

2. We must avoid "putting the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7). His ways are wise, just and true.

3. We will continue to learn to "worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10) in true repentance and in our genuine cultural identity and authenticity.



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# 6

**CHAPTER**

## EASTER

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## **ADRIAN JACOBS**

Ganosano of the Turtle Clan, Cayuga Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Grand River Territory, Ontario. Adrian is the father of five and grandfather of four. He lives in the Dish with One Spoon territory, working as senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation for the Christian Reformed Church of North America. He is a founding board member and Elders liaison for NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community.

# ‘I HEAR A NEW SOUND’ ADRIAN JACOBS

In 1994, I attended the Gathering of the Five Streams at Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon. I heard Richard Twiss say, “I hear a new sound.” He spoke about Christian worship as one of the five streams. He looked off into the distance above him. After Māori followers of Jesus did their traditional *haka*, they encouraged Indigenous followers of Christ from North America to embrace our own culture and identity. Our host was Garland Brunoe, vice chairman of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

The wives of Richard and Garland retrieved their husband’s drums and gave them to them. Richard and Garland began to drum and to sing in their languages. Many Indigenous Christian leaders got up and danced. I wanted to get up and dance, too, but didn’t. I told Richard I fully supported him and what everyone did that day.

In 1998, the Second World Christian Gathering on Indigenous People (WCGIP) was

held in Rapid City, South Dakota. Someone spoke of a vision they had of a big tent over the Black Hills, which was staked to seven reservations surrounding the Black Hills: Pine Ridge, Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Rosebud, Northern Cheyenne, Crow Agency and Wind River. This image of a huge tent and Richard’s words, “I hear a new sound,” stayed with me for many years.

One day the image and sound came together, reading Acts 15:16-18:

“‘AFTER THIS I WILL RETURN  
AND REBUILD DAVID’S FALL-  
EN TENT.

ITS RUINS I WILL REBUILD,  
AND I WILL RESTORE IT,

THAT THE REST OF MANKIND  
MAY SEEK THE LORD,  
EVEN ALL THE GENTILES  
WHO BEAR MY NAME,

SAYS THE LORD, WHO DOES  
THESE THINGS’ —  
THINGS KNOWN FROM  
LONG AGO.”

James commented on Apostle Paul's work among the Gentiles and on Peter's experience with the Gentile Cornelius. God made it clear that the work of Jesus was for Gentiles, too, and associated the Tabernacle of David with it.

The Tabernacle of David was not the same as that of Moses. The Tabernacle of Moses was an elaborate structure with many protocols. The Tabernacle of David was a simple tent housing the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence. David instituted 24 hours a day, seven days a week worship. There was no need to approach the Ark with many rituals. You could come directly to God and worship.

I saw the big tent over the Black Hills as the Tabernacle of David, where Indigenous people from all over could come with our own music, drums and dances. We could worship God in complete freedom and acceptance and dance like David.

At the Handsome Lake Longhouse, my father did not dance, but he walked along with everyone. Fancy footwork wasn't important. Participation mattered. At the Grand Entry of the Second WCGIP, I danced in with two of my children. I looked over my shoulder and my dad was dancing, too! I was never so happy.



## DOWNLOAD OUR PLAYLIST

Contributors and other members of the Indigenous Pathways family have curated a playlist of songs for Lent and Easter to accompany our journey through the season. Listen at <http://tinyurl.com/IPLent2024>.



# INDIGENOUS PATHWAYS



## WISHING YOU A BLESSED EASTER

We invite you to continue to dream with us at the 21st NAIITS symposium, "Dreaming Our World Home: The Roots and Role of Visions in Creating Indigenous Futures / an Indigenous Future," June 6-8, 2024, at Kairos University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

L E A R N   M O R E   A T

[NAIITS.COM/SYMPOSIUM2024](https://naaits.com/symposium2024)