

**Small Talk – August 4 2021**  
**By Michael Small**

A Sunday morning tradition for me is to listen to Krista Tippett's *On-Being* show at 6:00 am on Minnesota Public Radio. I always find her shows to be inspiring, thoughtful, and provocative. The *On-Being* show is described as "*Pursuing deep thinking and moral imagination, social courage and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together.* At the close of each show Krista says, "*The On-Being Project is located on Dakota land.*" That simple phrase or gesture reminds me that I too live on land that once was occupied by indigenous people, perhaps Ojibwe, among others. The indigenous peoples were among the first human occupants of almost all our lands – throughout the North American continent and beyond.

I was very encouraged when I read about the Nez Perce in Northeast Oregon. Donna Lugo from the *Salem Statesman Journal* writes "*Vice-Chairman Shannon Wheeler has been dreaming about this day for years.*

*"On Thursday, July 29, in Joseph Oregon, more than 150 Nez Perce (Niimiipuu) people returned and blessed part of their homeland, a hundred years after the U.S Army drove them from the Wallowa Valley in eastern Oregon.*

*In direct violation of the 1855 Treaty of Walla Walla, the Nez Perce in 1877 were forced from their 7.5-million-acre homeland to a 750,000-acre reservation in Idaho.*

*The Nez Perce tribe purchased a 148-acre property in Joseph, known as Am'sáaxpa, or Place of Boulders, in December.*

*"We would hope that our ancestors would feel the tears of joy and their tears will turn to joy because they see our people coming back to the land that we belong to," Wheeler said before the ceremony. "Our people know that we sprang from this land, and we're tied to the land in that manner and the land is also tied to us in the same way."*

*Reflecting upon the long-awaited return to their sacred land Norton BlackEagle, a direct descendant of Chief Joseph, said about the day - "It's about arriving at a place to forgive the unforgivable."<sup>1</sup>*

Think about that statement "to forgive the unforgiveable!" – moving from bitterness and anger to a place of forgiveness, beginning the healing process for the people and the land.

I would hope, when finalized there would be a similar ceremony for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. "*For a plan is now in place to transfer over 11,000 acres of land in the Chippewa National Forest back to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.*

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<sup>1</sup> I would encourage you to read the full article found at <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2021/07/29/oregon-nez-perce-tribe-celebrate-reclaimed-reservation-land-history-treaty-chief-joseph-amsaaxpa/5424269001/>

*In December 2020, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act, authored by U.S. Sen. Tina Smith and U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, was signed into law. The Act would transfer land from the Chippewa National Forest in Cass County to the U.S. Department of the Interior to be held in trust for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.*

*"It is with great joy and hope for the future in our hearts that we celebrate the latest step forward in restoring a portion of the illegally transferred lands back to the Leech Lake Ojibwe, Faron Jackson Sr. Chairman of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, said in a statement. "On behalf of the Band I want to express my gratitude to the Forest Service and Tribal staff collaborating behind the scenes to move this land transfer towards completion. This is one of the most monumental and positive developments to take place on Leech Lake since the first treaties were signed and the reservation was established in 1855."<sup>2</sup>*

Historically, the people who claimed and settled these lands broke promises, abused, and killed indigenous peoples, and attempted to destroy ancient cultures. The wrongs done can never be completely restored. But perhaps by first honoring and acknowledging that we all live on indigenous land, and then learning about these two events with the Niimiipuu and Ojibwe peoples, we will also know that there is a time for healing and reconciliation between peoples who were once enemies. Perhaps we too can join in and walk the journey of "forgiving the unforgiveable" with our indigenous brothers and sisters. When doing so, yes, the people begin the healing process, and yes, the healing of the land begins.

May all be restored and may all be made whole!

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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<sup>2</sup> Read full story at <https://www.fox9.com/news/plan-in-place-to-transfer-11k-acres-of-chippewa-national-forest-land-back-to-leech-lake-band-of-ojibwe>