

Small Talk – October 11 2021
By Michael Small

In grade school when Columbus Day occurred the teacher would often read the poem that begins with the words *“In fourteen hundred ninety-two Columbus sailed the ocean blue. He had three ships and left from Spain; He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain. . .”* We would memorize the names of those ships – the Santa Maria, Niña, and the Pinta. Sometimes the task of the day would be to build a model of one of the ships. We were taught that Christopher Columbus was looking for a trade route to India. On October 12, 1492, Columbus made landfall in what is now the Bahamas. Columbus and his ships landed on an island that the native Lucayan people called Guanahani. Columbus renamed it San Salvador.

Throughout most of my education (through college) we looked at the journey of Columbus and the colonization of the northern hemisphere uncritically. It was just the story of “natural” progress for the spread of western civilization. Growing up in the Oregon we were aware of the Warm Springs and Umatilla reservations east of the Cascades. There was some study done concerning the Nez Perce and Chief Joseph. We also understood after exposure to European sailors the Northwest tribal peoples of the pacific coastal regions were nearly wiped out by disease after their first encounter with Europeans. But, in reality, my only “positive” exposure to native/indigenous people was from the fictional story of The Lone Ranger and Tonto.

It was through my engagement with the United Church of Christ that I was first introduced to the proposal to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. With Columbus came the harmful and racist Doctrine of Discovery. The 29th General Synod of the United Church of Christ has call for the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

“Many Americans grow up learning that this continent was ‘discovered’ by Christopher Columbus. The concept of discovery, as if the land was empty prior to arrival and its indigenous inhabitants were somehow ‘less than’ the explorers is, at its heart, racism and cultural superiority.

“The doctrine of discovery, a concept of public international law expounded by the United States Supreme Court in a series of decisions, originated from various church documents in Christian Europe in the mid-1400s to justify the pattern of domination and oppression by European monarchies as they invasively arrived in the Western hemisphere. It theologically asserted the right to claim the indigenous lands, territories, and resources on behalf of Christendom, and to subjugate native peoples around the world.

“The U.S. Supreme Court used the doctrine to assert that the United States, as the successor of Great Britain, had inherited authority over all lands within our claimed boundaries. This decision allowed our government to legally ignore or invalidate any native claims to property and resources. To this day courts continue to cite this legal

precedent. It is still being used by courts to decide property rights cases brought by Native Americans against the U.S. and against non-Natives.”¹

Living in Northern Minnesota, I am acutely aware that we all live on land that was previously occupied by indigenous peoples. Two major Native American tribes—the Dakota (or Sioux) and the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe or Chippewa)—lived in the area that is now Minnesota. Also, for we who live in the Bemidji-Walker-Hackensack-Onigum-Longville-Pine River area we must understand that we are a border-community with another sovereign nation – the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag Ojibweg).

May we become good neighbors. May we seek restoration in our relationships. And on this Indigenous Peoples Day may we honor the ancestors who lived upon this land and these lakes.

The UCC names October 11 2021 *Thanksgiving Day in Canada—Indigenous Peoples’ Day in the United States*

Welcome to Living Psalms Nancy Arthur Best, Mohawk name, Golden Feather Woman. Nancy is a guest writer for this week as a person of First Nations heritage writing for the US commemoration of Indigenous People’s Day and a Canadian writing for Canadian Thanksgiving.

*Praise our Creator!
O Meegwetch give thanks to the Maker,
for Turtle Island nurtures us;
love lives forever in ancestors dancing in the aurora borealis.*

Who can truth talk the mighty doings of the Creator, or drum all his praise?

Joyful are those who observe justice, who work for right relations at all times.

Remember me, O Great Spirit, when you show honour to your people;

help me when you lead us places of protection;

*I see the grateful hunting of creatures,
generous gathering and abundant harvest prosperity of our clans,
that I may dance in the ceremonies of our nation’s people,*

that I may glory in your ancestry.

¹ https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/racial-justice/justice_racism_doctrine-of-discovery/

*All my Relations.*²

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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² https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/living_psalms/106_indigenous_peoples_day_a/