

December 18<sup>th</sup> 2016  
Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen  
This is a Camp of Prayer  
First Parish in Dorchester

LaDonna Allard, Director of the Sacred Stone Camp by the Cannonball River next to lake Oahe at Standing Rock, Lakota land was asked, "When do you consider this pipeline issue to be over?" She said "when every pipe is out of the ground and the earth is repaired across the United States. I am not negotiating, I am not backing down. I must stand for our grandchildren and for the water."

My great grandfather was an oil man. He was a partner in a small company in Western New York near the Pennsylvania border, Seneca land. The land of deer and derricks - or at least that is what it said in our Hungerford family reunion t-shirts. Stories from my mom's childhood begin with "Up on the lease one day..." There's a place in Bolivar, New York, at the intersection where you turn onto the road my grandma still lives, called the Pioneer Oil Museum. It's the kind of place you only see open during the annual parade, and is lightly staffed by volunteers with lots of stories. The kind of place where you can buy a hat for \$3 and children's research projects are welcome additions to the display cases. The kind of place where you can walk in, like I have done, and announce you are Frank Hungerford's great grand kid and the guy behind the counter will have stories about celebrating football games with beer chilled in streams, up on the lease. And he'll show you the exhibit where your great grandfather Frank Hungerford's metal lunch pail is.

The most recent time I visited, this past summer, I asked questions: Where did the land that my family drilled for oil on come from? Where did the right to drill for oil on it come from? Who gave it and why? My uncle Rick dug up old ledgers that listed oil production rates and prices, \$2.90 a barrel in 1929.

Frank's personal stationery read "Shamrock Oil Company: Producers of Petroleum" at the top. No one can quite remember where the drilling rights came from. What my mom does remember is periodic protests all throughout her childhood when the state of New York would threaten Seneca sovereignty by trying to collect new taxes on the Seneca Nation land. And she remembers the Kinzua dam. When she was 8, President Kennedy declined to intervene at the request of the Seneca People when the Army Corps of Engineers violated a 1794 treaty signed by George Washington. The Army Corps of Engineers flooded 10,000 Seneca Nation acres in Western NY and PA, resulting in the forced relocation of 600 people. Waters rising and engulfing houses, families fleeing. We drive on the Kinzua dam every time we go to visit my grandma by the Pioneer Oil Museum.

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Jennifer Elise Foerster, Muscogee Creek poet writes in "Leaving Tulsa" -  
"Along the highway's gravel pits  
sunflowers stand in dense rows.  
Telephone poles crook into the layered sky.  
A crow's beak broken by a windmill's blade.  
It is then I understand my grandmother:  
When they see open land  
they only know to take it."

I did not begin to ask these questions about my family until recently. Until a friend invited me into some local work a few years ago, trying to stop the West Roxbury Lateral Pipeline that is bringing fracked gas through Boston - despite the City of Boston suing against Spectra energy. The residential streets where it was built were taken by eminent domain and the pipeline route pasts a blasting quarry that causes houses to shake every day.

"There is a balm in Gilead," we sang, "to make the wounded whole, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul."

Part of healing the sin-sick soul for me, has been about understanding where I come from and using it as fire to try to be part of making the wounded whole.

In calling for an interfaith day of prayer at Standing Rock earlier this month, which many of our UU siblings in faith attended, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of White Buffalo Calf Pipe Bundle, Spiritual Leader of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations said,

"The hearts of all people's faiths must now unite in believing we can change the path we are now on. We, from heart of Turtle Island, have a great message for the world to unite for our children's future. Already we have witnessed many nations of life are now dying because of contamination: those that swim, those that crawl, those that fly, the plant nation, the four legged, and now the two legged..."

It is time that all of us become leaders to help protect the sacred upon Mother Earth. She is the source of life and not a resource.

In a Sacred Hoop of Life, where there is no ending and no beginning."

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She is the source of life and not a resource. Many of us, my family included, have used the earth as a resource. And have broken treaties, violated Native sovereignty and self-determination to do so.

For those of us non Native folks who have profited in some way from these systems - who have worked in the fossil fuel industry, or in some scientific field connected to it, for those of us, like Unitarian Universalists who are descended from religious traditions that used religion to say that Native folks are less than human and therefore their rights - to culture, to land, to family do not need to be respected, what is before us is invitation - an opportunity. To figure what it looks like to repair, reparate, reconnect. To heal our own sin sick souls.

Joseph Story was a Unitarian member of the Supreme Court that upheld the Doctrine of Discovery - a principle of international law rooted in a statement from Pope Nicholas V in 1452 that called for the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian territories and peoples.

In 1823, the United States Supreme Court ruled in support of the Doctrine of Discovery. Joseph Story wrote, "As infidels, heathens, and savages, [the Indians] were not allowed to possess the prerogatives belonging to absolute, sovereign and independent nations."

Which is to say the Europeans who arrived in what is now the US said, the people here are not Christian, and not human so we are not invading a nation, we are just coming into a land with no people where will make our own nation.

Kelly Hayes, a Native organizer and writer, wrote a letter to the frontlines of Standing Rock the day the governor of North Dakota issued a notice of eviction to Oceti Sakowin camp. She writes,

"I hope people see your determination and know that future isn't set. Knowing that myself, I am not mourning today's news, as I am sure you wouldn't want me to. We know despair heals nothing, builds nothing, and further empowers our enemies. We live in a disciplined state of hope, and have done so for centuries. I didn't always understand what that meant for me or my own freedom, but I do now, and I feel it more deeply because of you.

This country, built on death and human bondage, has not extinguished the lives it meant to snuff out, nor fully subverted the lives it has strived to control. It has accomplished much

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towards these ends, but our ancestors have risen, time after time, to prove what we are made of. We have survived this nation state's will for us because we are a fire that their water cannons cannot extinguish."

I went to Standing Rock in November - saw those water cannons. And also the disciplined hope, the fire that cannot be put out. I went to be of use. And out of my own sin sick soul. I went with a million swirling thoughts - better to stay in Boston and do solidarity work and donate the cost of my plane ticket? I'm not a doctor or a carpenter, how useful can I be? I knew I wanted to offer some support the UU congregation in Bismarck and it's minister – a UU church that is fiercely living out our values, has provided homestays to more than 85 water protectors coming out of jail or going to court, supported yurt that has housed everyone from groups of young Jewish activists to a nomadic Sufi monk to currently the camp legal team.

There are three principles of Oceti Sakowin camp - now sometimes called All Nations or Oceti Oyate camp - on treaty land between the Cannonball River and the bridge on highway 1806 that is still blockaded with razor wire and concrete barriers and armored vehicles, cutting off the fastest route from Bismarck, the nearest hospital to the many elderly folks who live on the reservation – the three principles are:

Indigenous centered

Be of use.

This is a camp of prayer and ceremony.

That principle is everywhere - this is a camp of prayer.

And it was. Praying that looks like dishes washed, vegetables cut, bison stew and wild rice served to hundreds- all in DIY tarps and tents, generators humming, winter wind blowing. Praying that looks like the tents of elders winterized, wood chopped for the sacred fire or one of the more than 8 communal kitchens. Praying that looks like strategic direct action in Bismarck targeting banks and state and federal government.

And praying that looks likes survival in the face of the violence of state.

To fall asleep to military helicopters, to see the drones whistling overhead, the sharpshooters on hills, the tanks in the middle of little rural highway 1806, to watch the water cannon, relentless and hear the rubber bullets and bean bags and the people doubled over from

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pepper spray. To know that any car leaving camp would likely be followed by undercover cops. And to know that this is the full weight of our federal government protecting a private corporation.

And it's one thing to know it has always happened this way and another to turn around from sorting clothes, trying to find wool layers and blankets for children and parents and teens who have stood on a bridge on their land, the drum never ceasing, water spray and pepper spray and rubber bullets coming at them, and see the bright, shocked eyes of a young person that just hours ago and I had stood in a direct action training next to, saying, I just need a dry coat. And then to turn and see him iced over, no longer making sense, gloves frozen stiff and to take him to medical and know that he was going to be ok, even though Sophia's hand is not and Suix Z's eye is not, and Brennan Nastacio, a Pueblo Water Protector who risked his life by who talking an armed Dakota Access private security person into putting down his weapon is on the Morton County Most Wanted List being charged with a felony. Because it turns out that is what resistance looks like when there is no difference between our government and the corporations it protects.

All the beauty of resistance.

All the horror of state violence.

Standing Rock is the balm and the sin.

Rashad Robinson, the executive director of Color of Change, says that for these times, we need 10% folks who can build bridges, 60% to fight - to fend off hate and protect the rights we've won. And 30% to hold a vision of what we are fighting for, what winning looks like.

Standing Rock has done all three.

And done them in ways that teach decolonization. Meetings at camp begin and end with prayer - usually led by a Native voice. In large conversations Native folks speak first, then non-Native people of color. Then white folks. Folks speak in indigenous languages first, then translate to English.

All powerful ways of making the wounded whole, of the truth of Kelly Hayes' words that: "This country, built on death and human bondage, has not extinguished the lives it meant to snuff out, nor fully subverted the lives it has strived to control. It has accomplished much towards these ends, but our ancestors have risen, time after time, to prove what we are made of."

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Standing Rock builds a muscle for the fact that we don't know how this ends and we have to urgently act well in every moment anyways - without luxury of certainty.

At the front lines that night there is a call for water to flush the pepper spray. And then blankets for those soaked by the water cannons. And then dry clothes. And then hot water. It was a microcosm of what solidarity looks like - responding to the call from the frontlines of injustice even when we don't know what is next. Being of use and willing to put down the blankets when it's time for hot water.

Yes, the Army Corps of Engineers denial of the easement is a win. And incoming powers are clear on his support for fossil fuel infrastructure.

And no one win will heal the past, the many wounds, the sin sick souls on all sides.

Eryn Wise of the International Indigenous Youth Council writes, "We've been fighting this fight our whole lives and now there is no doubt in our minds that our generation can change the future. We know that the next presidency stands to jeopardize our work but we are by no means backing down. We will continue protecting everywhere we go and we will continue to stand for all our relations. We say Lila wopila to everyone who has supported the resurgence of indigenous nations. This is just the beginning."