



NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES SUNDAY

SERMON STARTER

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Though congregations may celebrate Native American Ministries Sunday at any time, they are encouraged to observe the day with a special offering on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020. This sermon starter is based on Luke 24:13-35, the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel reading for that week. Preachers may adapt the message for the context of the congregation they serve. Consider including the liturgy ([link](#)) in a printed bulletin or handout to remind your congregation of this special day in the life of the church. Tie the fullness of this special Sunday with a coordinated offering talk ([link](#)) along with children's resources ([link](#)).

WALKING TOGETHER ON THE ROAD TO HOPE

Reading the Gospel lesson for this morning, I wondered how the disciples felt as they walked to Emmaus that first Easter. They had heard the women's account of the angel declaring that Jesus was alive. But they must have felt depleted, grieved, confused and exhausted. They had begun to lose hope. As they explained to the stranger walking with them, *"We had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel."*

WE HAD HOPED.

I can remember numerous times of disappointment and unrealized dreams when my faith was shaken. I HAD HOPED for a different outcome and couldn't make sense of what felt so unfair. But God never leaves us, even when it feels as if we are alone. God, through Jesus, walks alongside us on the road that leads from hopelessness to hope.

I wonder about the hopes and dreams of children like those at Jones Academy, a boarding school supported by the Choctaw Nation in Hartshorne, Oklahoma. The school



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serves about 200 students from nearly 29 American Indian tribes. Many of the children cannot stay with their families because of challenging circumstances such as poverty, addiction and abuse. These circumstances can lead to a sense of hopelessness.

Nearby, Grace Indian United Methodist Church, a mostly Native American congregation, has responded by walking together in ministry with the Jones Academy students.

Grace children's coordinator Gwen Parish, a member of the Choctaw Tribe, says, "We try to fill in the family gap and serve as the students' spiritual aunts, uncles (and) grandparents while they are away from home." Emphasizing the hopeful promise that the children hold, Parish says, "They are our future tribe as well as our future church. We want to set the standard for how a church treats others."

Grace Indian Church affirms the cultural identity of the students at Jones Academy and builds trusting and faithful relationships with them. The congregation walks together with students on the road to hope. (Full story here: <http://www.umcgiving.org/impact-articles/grace-indian-church-embraces-children>)

Jesus similarly ministers with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He leads them through the Scriptures, opening new interpretations. He affirms their cultural identity, reminding them that God worked through Moses to liberate the Hebrew people. He explains how everything pointed toward the Messiah's suffering and glory.

As the disciples listen, walking together on the road, they feel their hearts strangely warmed. Finally, at Emmaus, they regain a vision of hope, recognizing this stranger as Jesus in the breaking of bread.

What makes your heart feel strangely warm? When do you experience hope? Where do you feel the presence of the Divine walking with you?

When we move into the world, beyond the walls of the church, how do we share this hope with our neighbors who are experiencing hopelessness?



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Today, we have an opportunity to be part of ministries of hope through our Native American Ministries Sunday offering.

We have the opportunity to share the bread of Christ in ministry with our Native American siblings. Walking together, we nourish one another as Jesus did with his friends who invited him to stay with them.

Through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, we celebrate the ministries of Native American United Methodist churches. Our offering connects us to ministries such as the hope-filled relationship between Grace Indian Church and the students of Jones Academy. We recognize that Jesus is walking with all of us, leading us on the road to hope.

The two disciples couldn't stay where they were in Emmaus after witnessing the risen Christ. We read, *"That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together...Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread."*

Our relationship with Jesus is not intended to remain a secret.

As we go from here today, I invite you to remain alert to God's surprise appearances, equipped to nourish the world with justice and "heart-warmed" to share the good news of God's active presence walking with us on the road to hope.

The Lord has risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.



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