

When a Native American Broke My Heart

“What are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? You’ve made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur.”

Psalm 8:4-5, CEB

We were on a mission trip to the Lakota Indian Reservation of Spirit Lake in North Dakota. Touring the reservation, our host and guide led us into a housing development for low-income wage earners. She pointed out the beautiful playground equipment in the center of the compound. Our guide told us a United Methodist work team from Wisconsin had erected the playground set.

She went on to say that while the team was working on the playground, many of the children and youth came out of their homes to watch. After a while, one young teenage Native American boy came to our guide, who was working along with the mission team and questioned her, “Why are you building this playground equipment here?”

She responded, “Because we want the children of this area to have something to play on.” The young man continued his questioning, “I understand that, but why are you building that playground here?” She answered him with a different answer, “Because we are Christians, and we want to bring some happiness to this area.”

That answer still did not satisfy the young man. “You don't understand lady,” he insisted. “Why are you building that playground set in this neighborhood?” She responded, “Because Jesus has called us to love him, and we love him by showing that love to others.”

Finally, the young man stopped our guide and said, “What I mean is, why are you doing this for us? We are only Indians.” At that point, our guide broke down and wept. Hearing her story broke our hearts.

That story has made wonder,

- What has happened to a people “made a little lower than angels” for them to come to the place of having an attitude, “We are only Indians?”
- Who has created that consciousness in the Native American?
- How can that attitude be changed?
- How can I help to change that attitude?
- How can I tell them and show them they are special in God's sight?
- What other groups have been led to believe “they are only ...” and of little worth?
- Am I guilty?

This story did more than break my heart; it also made me more aware of how I need to bestow worth on all people in general and, specifically, how I can bring worth to my Native American brothers and sisters.

The best way I know is to convey in word and deed the worth that God, through Jesus Christ, has placed upon God's children. "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16a, NRSV).

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