

SPECIAL
SUNDAY

NATIVE AMERICAN MINISTRIES SUNDAY

SERMON STARTER



This sermon starter is based on Luke 24:36b-48 and 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3. It is part of the Native American Ministries pastor and leader kit and connects with the theme “Holy Presence: Declaring Divine Love.” It can be adapted for your context and integrated into your worship service with the other material in the kit.

At a recent rally on the steps of the Pennsylvania State Capitol building, members of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania encouraged legislatures to give them legal status as a recognized tribe. One woman spoke sorrowfully of a relative who performed sacred ceremonies alone in a basement room, ashamed to express his spirituality in the open.

Perhaps her relative could relate to the disciples hidden in the upper room on the day of resurrection. In the familiar Easter season Gospel reading, Jesus appears to the disciples who have hidden themselves in a locked room and says, “Peace be with You!” He then asks them if they have anything to eat.

As he so often does, Jesus invites people to the table to break bread and share in his peace. Jesus celebrates, as Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica, the work that comes from faith, effort that comes from love, and perseverance that emerges through our hope in Christ.

Coming together around the literal or figurative table for justice-seeking and

peace-building is hard work. This church is built on the land that for thousands of years was home to (preacher add tribe here). This nation was stolen from Native American people and built on the backs of enslaved African people. A legacy of violence and racism is woven into the tapestry of this country and even into that of the church.

How do we dismantle systems that harm our neighbors and loved ones while building up foundations of love and peace with justice if we, like the disciples, are hiding from the world? How do we encourage others, including our Native American church family, to practice their faith freely out in the open without fear of ridicule or discrimination?

Time and again, Jesus models the power of relationship building as a declaration of Divine love.

Native American Ministries Sunday is an opportunity to catch a glimpse of how God’s realm is manifesting here and now. For example, the Eastern Pennsylvania Committee on Native American Ministries

(CoNAM) and the Greater New Jersey CoNAM have crossed conference lines to develop relationships with the fifth-oldest Native American Methodist church in the U.S. St. John UMC in Bridgeton, New Jersey, is home to many members of the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation. Stronger together, the two conferences joined their resources, including financial assistance and spiritual support, a partnership that was especially important when St. John was the victim of a hate crime.

It takes time and perseverance and sometimes even pain, but the more engaged we are, the more we begin to see signs of God’s presence among us through our faith, love, and hope that comes from Jesus. He stands among us, saying, “Peace be with you!”

There are so many ways that we can embody our faith even when the traditions and rituals may look different. As we celebrate and learn from one another, including on this Native American Ministries Sunday, we declare Divine love that offers resurrection hope.



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