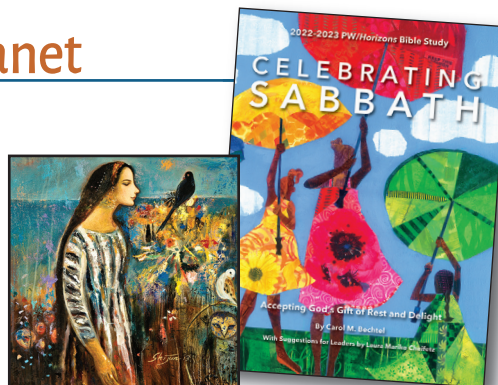


From Root to Twig, Individual to Planet

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson Seven of the 2022–2023 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel



Scripture: Luke 13:10–21

One afternoon when I was a teenager, a bee (or wasp or some other variety of insect defending its territory) stung me. A big welt formed on my arm and it hurt pretty good. My father noticed my arm and presented me with a small stick. He told me to chew on a little bit of this twig, then to place the dampened bits on the welt. The second I tasted this stick it took everything I had not to spit the whole stuff out of my mouth! My dad urged me to keep chewing it until the wood became like pulp. I managed to do it and almost as soon as I placed the pulp on my welt, the swelling and redness calmed. Whether the taste of that twig distracted me from other sensations or the pulp contained the perfect cure—or perhaps a mix of both—it wasn't long before the pain subsided.

I asked my dad what that stick was, and he very reluctantly told me it was called “sweet flag.” I asked why they called it sweet, because it was *anything* but that. He didn't say much more about it except that it was found in creeks and you had to dig for it. Years later, I found out that sweet flag is also widely known as calamus (and also “bitter pepper root” if you're still curious what it tastes like!). I learned more about this plant and how the roots spread horizontally underground and can be used to treat a number of ailments.

I learned this years later because one of the topics that Indigenous people rarely discuss is traditional medicines. It was obvious to even my younger self that those conversations were very sacred, and not to happen unless there was a reason to bring it up. Even though I desperately wanted to know more, I was careful not to ask too much about some of the medicines and the spirit people and healers who had extensive knowledge of traditional medicines. It wasn't until

years later that I found out that those conversations could lead to unpleasant misfortunes that are very hard to describe in words.

While more and more the internet promises to reveal every bit of wisdom, sharing it to all parts of the world, opening it up to commentary and dissection, mystery about many things in life still remains. We still encounter much that cannot be fully explained. Over the years, I've recognized that plants and medicines like sweet flag are living beings—“living” in a way that goes beyond taking in nutrients and growing. They offer healing, health and wholeness to us and it is only revealed in ways we cannot really explain. And yet, at these strange times in life, we find that healing can come when we least expect it, and when we need it the most.

Just as animals have a way of communicating with us, so do plants, trees and flowers. Having a relationship with these beings brings us closer to appreciating the depth and breadth of God's creation. Even minerals in the ground can offer healing. It is easy to see that these elements come from God's creation. If we imagine the Garden of Eden, we tend to think of plants that provide food, but rarely do we think of plants yielding medicines to help protect us from ailments and illnesses.

Is there a plant or mineral that you feel connected to?

If so, how do you find that connection helps you in your life?

Is there a plant, flower, tree or mineral that you would like to find a connection with?

What other resources do Mother Earth and God provide us with that keep us healthy?

In what ways can we honor these resources and not deplete the supplies so that our future generations can benefit from these resources?

Indigenous teachings talk about Mother Earth as the nurturer of the people. Seeing the tall prairie grasses as Mother Earth's hair shows how it is braided to make sweetgrass sticks which help keep our spaces clean. It is painful to think about how mining companies have dismantled mountains, prioritizing gold and other resources with monetary value over balance and care for our world at any cost.

Having relationship with Mother Earth can help us to see the importance of earth care and tending to the health of the plants, trees and other life. Other than recycling and conserving water at home, finding a time to honor our relatives that heal us can help us to recognize the importance of utilizing all of the resources that God gives us.

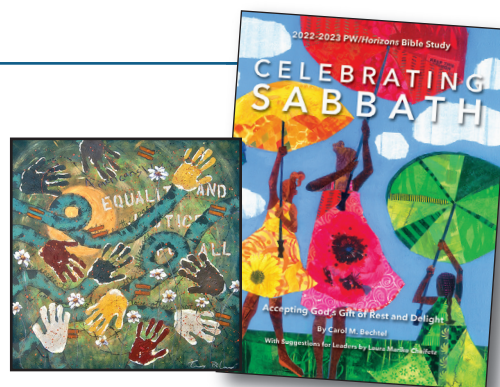
Prayer: God of all life, we thank you for Mother Earth. We thank you for the resources that are provided to us. Forgive us when we move in your world without recognizing all your creation embodies and makes possible. Help us to find ways to respect the resources and the lands we inhabit. We thank you for lessons taught to us on how these resources can bring us healing. Like the woman who approached Jesus and received healing, help us to find that healing as well, even for those ailments and illnesses we don't yet recognize. Through your everlasting grace and mercy we pray. AMEN.

Danelle Crawford McKinney is the first Dakota woman (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate) ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a teaching elder from Dakota Presbytery. She also works with Indigenous young adults at Haskell Indian Nations University.

A Vision of Justice

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson Eight of the 2022–2023 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel



Scripture: Isaiah 58

No matter a person's culture or time in history, they will suffer injustice, harm others or witness harm being done. And as people who are part of a culture and community, as people called by God to care for one another, the need for resolving these injustices will arise.

Early Indigenous communities practiced a thoughtful and holistic model of justice. In those societies, when a member of a tribe or village committed a crime, they were brought to the attention of the community. Perhaps because the community needed everyone's contributions to increase their chance at collective survival, banishing or executing the offender would ultimately harm the whole. Or perhaps it wasn't just pragmatism, but rather deep commitment to one another. Either way, communities resolved the issues that threatened to divide and weaken them. A community's leaders and medicine people gathered the victims and perpetrators of the harm to discuss the difficult situations and find ways to bring justice to everyone.

Today, many communities, schools and even families practice "restorative justice"—a way to remediate harm and restore healthy relationships. This concept is taken from traditional Indigenous systems for prioritizing healing of those affected by crimes or behavior that compromised their health and safety.

In the Bible Study Resource for Lesson Five, I summarized the witness of the 38 Dakota men who were sentenced to death by President Lincoln in 1862. The U.S. had repeatedly changed terms of land treaties and refused to send payments to starving tribes, but it was the Dakota men who fought back against these injustices who were sentenced to death. It was the largest

execution in American history. It was also a government sanctioned injustice—one of many systemic actions against Indigenous communities that embodied a deep racism.

In 2005, a man by the name of Jim Miller—a descendant of the Dakota displaced by the contested land treaty and a combat Vietnam war veteran—had a vision. The vision showed him putting medicine on a horse and leading a group of people to a place he had never seen. The vision told Mr. Miller that he would lead a group on horseback across South Dakota and Minnesota and gather at the hanging site in Mankato. The purpose of this ride was to bring healing to the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota people, as this was a day of tragedy for Indigenous people.

In a video about the ride,* Mr. Miller said that we as Indigenous people were going to be the first to offer a hand of love. Rather than blame communities for our current situations of substance abuse, violence and outright racist hatred directed towards us, we as Indigenous people were to show acts of love towards people we felt represented genocide. It was a challenge for all Dakota, Lakota and Nakota people to help the future generations find healing. The video shows the hardships and sacrifices that these Dakota warriors did on behalf of the people. Indigenous people have been finding ways to bring healing to communities through learning traditional ways, the language and the teachings of elders. Changes have been made to help honor Dakota traditions and to eliminate systemic racism, but most importantly awareness was raised about the loving nature of the Dakota people.

For Indigenous people, sabbath/ceremony go hand in hand with justice. Internal unresolved pain results in unresolved personal issues, so finding ways to heal from trauma is the best way to restore our spiritual bodies. Value systems such as generosity, respect and love are powerful tools for healing to occur.

If you feel comfortable, describe a time when you were able to resolve a hardship in your life that grew from injustice.

[illegible]

Describe how that resolution brought healing to you.

[illegible]

Passages throughout this Bible study mention being present with God, with a community or even with nature. Being present helps to establish a strong connection to something we may have been lacking in our lives. Isaiah 58 mentions being present in the lives of those who have faced injustices.

Who are those who have faced injustices in your community?

In what ways can we be present with those who have faced injustice?

Prayer: God of healing, we thank you for restorative justice. We especially thank you for your son who made the ultimate sacrifice to restore us to a higher ground with you. Help us to discover those in our own community who face injustice. Help us to be present with those who need healing so that we may be able to share your love that has helped us through our own hardships. Help us to utilize our sabbath to recognize your will that we become members of a loving and accepting community. We lean on your wisdom and grace to guide and direct our actions, helping us focus on others rather than our own wants. We pray in the faith of your unending love for us. AMEN.

Danelle Crawford McKinney is the first Dakota woman (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate) ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a teaching elder from Dakota Presbytery. She also works with Indigenous young adults at Haskell Indian Nations University.

Notes

*Dakota 38+2, Smooth Feather Productions (2012);
youtube.com/watch?v=ZLjzUNXMbhm.