



## **Lent and the Doctrine of Discovery** *The second Sunday in Lent: Manifest Destiny No More*

In Genesis 12:1-4a, God spoke to Abraham, calling him to take his family and migrate to another land, pledging to make them into a great nation and promising blessings to all the families of the earth.

To our ancestors whose individual families emigrated from Europe to colonial North America, or those who immigrated after the United States has become a nation, God's call to Abraham might have been experienced as a great source of comfort and a sign of God's faithfulness. Their own migration may have been understood as a call to the "New World" as Promised Land.

But, even for family migration like that of Abraham, which is understood as God's call to an individual, its collective expression in the generation of Joshua came to serve in the nationalistic interest of conquest, with tragic consequences for peoples already in the land. In fact, Abraham's journey through Canaan (Genesis 12:6-9) was replicated in the general route of conquest under Joshua that dispossessed the Canaanites from the land (see Joshua 7:2; 8:9, 30).

Similarly, during the expansion of the U.S. in the early 1800s, the Supreme Court in *Johnson v. McIntosh*, using the Doctrine of Discovery, claimed that the nation had inherited the conquest of indigenous lands from the English. The idea of "manifest destiny" grew out of the Doctrine of Discovery, and popularized the view that the U.S. was called by Providence to dominate the continent for its expansion, and justified the removal of indigenous people from their lands.

### **Reflection**

By repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery, our eyes are opened to the *other* side of the idealistic picture of the individual pilgrim in search of religious freedom and a better life. By removing the romantic blinders of "manifest destiny," we see the brutal consequence of this collective idealism in the dispossession and genocide of indigenous people, and the continuous impacts on contemporary Native American communities. What, then, would be repentance for us today?

Abraham was called to move from a place of habit and familiarity, to a place unknown yet sustained by God's faithfulness. Perhaps the call for us individually today is to move from the comfort zone of "common sense" bias and indifference, when it comes to the plight of Native American communities. It is a call to a new place of humility, understanding and solidarity.

In seeing how the lives of generations of indigenous peoples in North America have been complicated by centuries of conquest we can also see that the lives of the descendants of settler/immigrants are also implicated in the benefit of such historic dispossession across generations. What, then, would repentance look like, in action, for the communities that you are in? Furthermore, what would the repentance of a nation look like?

Abraham's call was a command to give up his old identity, in order to covenant with God. He and his descendants would assume a new identity according to God's faithfulness to bless all peoples on earth. The Doctrine of Discovery and "manifest destiny" is the old American identity. What would a new American identity that truly blesses all people look like?

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*The Lenten season is a time of repentance, reflection, and preparation for Easter. Therefore, it is fitting to continue on the journey of Sacred Conversations on Race during this season to deepen our understanding of repentance from racism. For the five Sundays in Lent the United Church of Christ has created a series of reflections on selected lectionary texts, using the lens of the doctrine of discovery. We invite you to engage with them as you prepare to the encounter the risen Christ anew this Easter. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/lent-dod>*

*For more information on the UCC Council of American Indian Ministries (CAIM) visit [caimucc.org](http://caimucc.org).*