



## **Lent and the Doctrine of Discovery**

### ***The fourth Sunday in Lent: Darkness Exposed***

In John 9:1-41, Jesus gave sight to a man born blind. The miracle was performed despite the disciples' difficulty understanding Jesus's concern for the blind man. Through this healing, Jesus repudiated the old theology that said that tragedy is the consequence of sin. Instead, he revealed that the man was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him.

The Pharisees in the healing story had a hard time seeing God's revelation in Jesus' healing – that he came to liberate those they deemed sinful. Instead of rejoicing with the man who received sight, and giving glory to God for this liberation, they argued whether Jesus, who broke the Sabbath, could really be showing God's powers! Where is the real blindness here?

As children of God called to live in the light of Christ (Ephesians 5:8-9), we are called to take responsibility to repudiate a dark chapter in our own history, of invaders proclaiming and killing American Indians under the guise of the Doctrine of Discovery and with the blessing of the Church. We can work to expose the darkness of a racist theology that denied the image of God in American Indians by treating them as "pagan," "evil," "savage," and their existence as sinful.

### **Reflection**

In 1805, when New England missionaries asked permission to preach to the Senecas, Chief Red Jacket responded with his famous speech "Religion for the White Man and the Red." He noted that the missionaries had been preaching to the white people in the area. He knew them, for they were his neighbors. He concluded his lengthy response with the following:

"We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon [the settlers]. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said." He then closed his speech offering them a blessing on their way back to Boston. He moved to shake hands with the missionaries who turned their back to him and left.

Today, as the Church makes statements and passes resolutions to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, the challenge of Chief Red Jacket to our missionary ancestors is again offered to us as a blessing. What would be the fruits of our repentance? How can we authentically atone in a way that does not render the grace of God as cheap? What reparation would be befitting of the enormity and depth of injury?

As neighbors to American Indian communities facing extreme poverty and high teenage suicide rates, how could we make God's love visible and God's justice real, on this road to full reconciliation? As congregations are slowly going into attrition, how could we partner with them? As we claim our collective responsibility as the Church, how would your congregation take action?

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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>*

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