

2017 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

**In Advent, we awaken to the deep needs of the world
for justice, peace and restoration.**

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:24 CEB



At 87 years old, Ginger Harlow Allen attended PEC's 2017 Conference, *Blessing the Waters of Life*, that was held September 25-29 in the Columbia Watershed near Portland, Oregon. She reflects on how her participation in this conference shifted her worldview on injustices. "No matter how many resources I could have read, nothing would have prepared me for the impact of the Presbyterian Earth Care Conference subjects concerning our Indigenous Peoples, the salmon and the issue of water access. One has only to become nominally immersed in the culture of Native American injustices, and to be made aware of the threat to our use of unpolluted water, to be alarmed... I've glimpsed the future, and even in this year of crazy political unrest, and what seems a lowering of moral standards on every side, I feel HOPE for the future."

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Introduction and Back Story continued

To continue our learning about and from the indigenous begun at the conference, PEC asked the Reverend Kathy Keener to coordinate our Advent devotional this year and to ask our new Native American friends to write the reflections. Kathy was very involved with the indigenous at the conference and rode in the car with four members of the Nez Perce tribe from Eastern Oregon to the conference.

The process of coordinating the writers was much more challenging than Kathy thought. “I learned that the idea of writing devotions for Advent is an unknown concept for our indigenous friends. The modern creative writing of American church celebrations doesn't match with their experience... their liturgy is formulaic and pre-scripted; they do not write their own devotions. I learned that my ideas for possible points of connection between the experience of our Native participants and Advent were my white, western-educated theological and environmental ideas. When I asked about the deep needs that they see in their world, I got answers that were not earth-care relevant.”

Undaunted by the challenges, Kathy called and interviewed Jeannie Strong, Corbett Wheeler and Irvin Porter over the phone and transcribed those



calls. She went back to her video footage of Sam Davis, and made a transcript of his presentation at the conference and excerpted it for the devotion in his name. Kathy also collected photos, wrote bios and wrote about her own experiences being drawn into Standing Rock's Water Protector movement, for the Christmas Day reflection.

Our deepest gratitude goes to Kathy Keener for her persistence and commitment to allowing the voices of Native Americans to be heard. May your understanding of and compassion for our indigenous neighbors become broader as you reflect on their lives and wisdom in this year's Advent Devotional.



First Sunday in Advent: Wherever the river flows, everything will live

Wherever the river flows, every living thing that moves will thrive. There will be great schools of fish, because when these waters enter the sea, it will be fresh. Wherever the river flows, everything will live. Ezekiel 47:9 CEB

Each spring and fall, Jeannie Strong's father fished salmon at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River to provide food for his family and community. Nez Perce fishermen from Idaho joined those from other tribes netting fish from platforms suspended above the falls while their families cleaned, smoked and dried the fish to preserve it. They were part of a 9,000 year-old ritual of Native people meeting at Celilo Falls to fish, trade and feast.

In 1957, the Corps of Engineers completed The Dalles Dam (12 miles downstream from Celilo Falls) to generate hydropower and to simplify barge navigation on this stretch of the Columbia River.

When the Fall's cliffs were submerged under the dam's reservoir, native people lost access to sacred sites including Celilo's village, cemetery and fishing grounds. At the time of the damming, fishers annually caught 2.5 million pounds of fish for subsistence and commercial purposes.

The inundation of Celilo Falls was a devastating cultural loss for Columbia River tribes. The cycle of their lives brought them to Celilo for fellowship and ritual in addition to sustenance.

"We took my father down for the 50th anniversary of

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when Celilo was flooded. He lived to 96, and outlived a lot of people. It was good to have the different tribes together again for ceremony and the reunion. He was an elder at Northfork Presbyterian Church where my brother is now an elder.”

In 2017, many Native fishers live in substandard trailers and families’ homes still haven’t been replaced as promised by the US Government. Resentment over the loss of sacred waters and land still simmers among Native People.

At the new Celilo Long House, participants from the *Spirit of the Salmon* pre-conference immersion enjoyed a salmon feast hosted by Celilo-Wyam

fishing families. Elders told stories of Celilo Falls and its import to their lives. Children and young adults explained how their *canoe family* prepares for an annual spiritual journey. Hosted by a tribe in the US or Canada, [canoe families paddle and camp, sharing traditional songs, language, dance and celebrations](#) along Pacific Northwest waterways. The real journey is an internal, personal experience for each member of the canoe family. “What we do out there is we heal. We heal the land, the water, the people,” explained Shannon Comenot, who compared time on the water to a constant, and conscious, state of prayer. “It’s a way of life. Going out on the water is the only thing unchanged since our ancestors.”

Meditation: Do you have home waters to which you return or long to see again? Pause and imagine that you are by your home water. Are you alone or with others? What are you doing? Do you touch the water or cause a splash? Does the sound of the water affect the rhythm of your breath? Are there children to whom you want to introduce these home waters? In the Advent time of preparation, may our memory of the waters of our lives refocus us to see what is sacred and holy in and around us. Amen.



Jeannie Strong is an elder in First Indian Presbyterian Church in Kamiah, Idaho - a church founded by her grandfather on the Nez Perce Reservation. She describes herself as “three part Nez Perce; one part French. Dad was a Nez Perce speaker.” She traveled from Lapwai, Idaho to participate in the Presbyterians for Earth Care conference on the Columbia. She said, “I felt really good about the conference; Celilo and Standing Rock are so important.”

Jeannie’s father is wearing a white t-shirt in the foreground of the historic photo of native fishermen at Celilo Falls prior to its inundation in 1957, on the previous page. (Corps of Engineers photo, public domain)

Advent is a time to recognize that the world needs Jesus and God’s healing restoration of the world. It is about looking for Jesus’ return as much as it is about the birth of a baby.



Second Sunday in Advent: Water is Sacred! That's the Lord's refrigerator!

Mary praises God – The Magnificat

Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever." Luke 1:46-56 CEB

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People came from throughout the country in solidarity with those who live in the Columbia Watershed declaring, “Water is Sacred!” It feels encouraging to learn that someone else cares to better your circumstances; that someone cares about your water. When your family fishing grounds have been flooded over. When the temperature of the river water is rising, so that fish are hiding in deep holes instead of swimming in their usual riffles. When anglers find parasites on the outside and worms curled up in the meat of the fish. When chemicals are causing mutations. When few salmon make it past dams to the spawning ground.

Mary sings with joy and amazement about the grace of God who chooses a Hebrew teenager to bear the Son of God into the world. She isn’t royalty or upper class, yet she is chosen over those women

and men. Mary’s song infers that by choosing her, God’s justice has turned the tables on the rich and powerful. Embodied in her is a gift of the continuing mercy that God promised generations ago to her ancestors.

Corbett Wheeler, Clerk of Session at Northfork Presbyterian Church on the Nez Perce Reservation in North-Central Idaho provided leadership for this fall’s *Spirit of the Salmon – Water, Culture, and Justice in the Columbia Watershed*, an eco-justice immersion and its successor, *Blessing the Waters of Life: Justice and Healing for our Watersheds*. He remarked, “It is good knowing that others are concerned about the dams and water and the salmon. That has always been something with us [the Nez Perce]. That is the Lord’s refrigerator, you know.”

Prayer: God of sacred water and just living, hear our prayer for the healing of the lakes, rivers and streams. Restore the health of the fish and creatures that live in your waters. Lead us to live with care for your creation. Amen

Corbett Wheeler serves on the Native American Consulting Committee for the PC(USA). He was raised in a strict Presbyterian family on the Nez Perce Reservation. His dad’s grandfather was a minister, and the family have all been leaders in Presbyterian Churches.

Pictured to the right is Corbett Wheeler.

Pictured on page 5 are: Jeannie (Wheeler) Strong, Kathy Keener, Sam Davis, Ida Ann (Wheeler) Pinkham and Corbett Wheeler.





Third Sunday in Advent: Threatened Foods and Churches

Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground – to everything that breathes – I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. Genesis 1:29-31a CEB

Water is the first food needed for life. Salmon is a major source of food for native people of the Columbia River Gorge and its tributaries. When the US Government moved Native People from their usual lands to reservations, less healthy foods (wheat flour, lard and salt) were the staples *supplied*/introduced to tribes who were accustomed to a diet of salmon, deer, root vegetables and berries. Today, there is a growing movement to restore Native American health by reclaiming traditional diets and food-ways and increasing access to nutritious food.

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Rev. Irvin Porter is Associate for Native American Congregational Support in the PC(USA). He is cultivating health in the 95 churches and chapels of Native American Presbyterians, which are part of the Presbyterian Church (USA). These congregations need sustainable resources to bring spiritual food to their communities. Irv focuses prayers and his energy to the Native American Youth Conference and its Youth Council to form young leaders. Of the four adult advisors to the last conference, three were participants as youth and the fourth was the conference organizer! Most Native churches are served by older commissioned ruling elders (lay pastors) and retired part-time clergy. Irv is raising funds for an endowment to support the Youth Conference.

Prayer: God of all life, may our relationship with you recognize how closely our wellbeing is tied to that of all creation. May we honor the inextricable connection between nutrition, food, health, the land and the relationship of Indigenous People to the land and water. Amen.



Rev. Irvin Porter is descended from three Native American tribes: T'hono O'odham, Pima, and Nez Perce. He grew up in Phoenix, Arizona and has also lived on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. He serves part-time for the PC(USA) as the Associate for Native American Congregational Support. Irv is also pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Indian Fellowship, an urban Native PC(USA) congregation in Tacoma, Washington. He is their first Native American pastor in the 141 years since the church was founded among the Puyallup Indians.

Irv and his wife live in Puyallup, Washington.



Fourth Sunday in Advent:

“It’s all about the water and I have seen it.”

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city’s main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree’s leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. Revelation 22:1-3a CEB

Sam Davis spent the summer fishing on the Columbia River. With Nez Perce tribal rights, he set gill nets to catch salmon. This year, with warmer water temperatures, aquatic weeds and grasses tangled in his nets, so they could not be left in for the usual time. The nets became too heavy. The river bottom is filled with silt where it used to be fine pebbles that the fish liked.

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Salmon used to travel from the Pacific Ocean up the Columbia, then up the Snake River to the Clearwater River and other tributaries to spawn on the Nez Perce Reservation. Sam remembers his dad and uncles casting off and catching salmon for dinner from the Clearwater River, on their property. But Sam has seen the salmon decline. “The dams started coming in there on the Snake River and we could tell that the fish were disappearing. The sockeye were going extinct. Where the fish used to swim, there was all clear water with no fish.” On the Reservation, at the Clearwater River they built the Dworshak dam. “And above the dam there are no fish. There is all clear water coming this way.”

In May this year, Sam came to fish the Columbia River, but the water was too high to fish. He went home to Idaho to fish the South Fork of the Salmon River, then he went up to the Sawtooth Mountains. Sam returned to the Columbia for the rest of the summer. During the weeks of the Columbia Gorge Fire, Sam continued to fish with almost zero visibility due to dense smoke filling the Gorge.

Sam grew up chasing the salmon. On their way to the sea; and as they made the long journey to return home to spawn. “It is all about the water and I have seen it.”

Prayer: God, we read Johns’ revelation and Sam’s words calling attention to your water. We also see where restoration and new life are needed in your creation. As we await your return, may we together work for the healing of the water and land. Amen.



Sam Davis retired from the Lewiston, Idaho munitions factory in 1994. He began fishing regularly on the Columbia River and its tributaries. Sam is Nez Perce and has family living on the Nez Perce Reservation. He knows fishermen from many tribes, meeting them at boat launches and along the river banks. He encourages young people to learn the Native arts of fishing. “I’ve got grandsons and all my family; I think about them growing up. They were proud I got to go here. It’s a very spiritual place and I am a Presbyterian.”

Advent is about the need for Jesus and for God’s healing restoration of the world.



Christmas: “Hold the line for water. And for life.”

In the fall of 2016, I was swept into the Standing Rock water protector movement by the words of Kandi Mossett, a member of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nations.

“Women, in my culture, are the keepers of the water. Men are the keepers of the fire. It’s no coincidence that when we’re pregnant, we carry our babies in water. And the understanding is that water is the first life. It’s our very essence. Our very being is made up of water. Flows through us. And it flows through from the rivers, to the sky, back down in that circular way. And it’s an understanding of the cycle and the natural order of things.

It’s just so much bigger, though, than just one pipeline. It’s the fossil fuel industry. It’s ultimately going to be something that comes back on us as humanity.

It doesn’t matter the color of our skin, it doesn’t matter our religious background, when we desecrate the water, we desecrate ourselves.

We’re all, as women, going to keep on holding that line, pushing forward. Hold the line for water. And for life.”¹

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Her words resonate deeply. I carried and birthed a daughter. Clean, pure, healthy water is needed by every person and deserved by every child. Ordinary water becomes extraordinary in the Sacrament of Baptism. As an Oregonian, I know well the cycle of rain, evaporation and more rain. I have followed a river downstream where fresh and salt water mix in estuaries. Privileged with good water to drink, I am sad when I hear of people and places without safe, plentiful water. I become angry when greed and carelessness cause water shortages and pollute streams and aquifers.

On this day when we celebrate the birth of Mary's son, I think of the water, the umbilical fluid, which cushioned Jesus' donkey ride in his mother's womb and burst forth signaling the time of delivery; the water that bathed the newborn child; and the water which quenched Mary's thirst, hydrating her body so she could produce milk to feed her baby.

In Kandi Mossett's words,

"I am protecting the very essence of what I am made up of which is mostly water.

I am protecting that for my future generations – All those who can't speak for themselves. Not just the babies but everything that flies in the sky, all those that swim in the waters, the four-leggeds.

Somebody has to speak on their behalf because they don't have a voice. "¹

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1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8Uwo6ZAEG4> Dakota Access Pipeline: Protectors not Protesters by Fusion Video, Published on Sep 8, 2016
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Prayer: For Christmas this year, may all of God's children have safe, pure water. Together, may we be prophetic voices to protect water for all. Water is life. Amen.



Kathy Keener is interim pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton, Oregon. She grew up in Oregon's 'Ecotopia' and attempts to integrate sustainable practices in her life.

Kandi Mossett is a Mandan-Hidatsa-Arika warrior mother from the Fort Berthold Reservation in South Dakota. She works with the Indigenous Environmental Network.