Thanksgiving – A Time for Gratitude, Grace and Reflection

This Thanksgiving we invite you and your family to spend a few moments reflecting on the bounty of God's gifts found around the world. Take time to explore the role that God's creation and bounty plays in the traditions and cultures of Native Americans and how we are all connected to God's earth through food, land and water.

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy. ***Psalm 65:5-13***

Bristol Bay – God's Bountiful Gift

Bristol Bay, in south central Alaska, is home to the last great salmon run and fishery in the world. For thousands of years, Bristol Bay has been home to Alaskan natives and salmon alike.

The majority of the 7,500 people that live around Bristol Bay are Native Alaskans who depend on subsistence fishing. Each year, the Yupik Eskimo, Aleut, and Athabaskan, the three primary native Alaskan tribes that live around the Bay, benefit from the more than 2.4 million pounds of salmon that feed their families and communities through the winter. Salmon accounts for more than 50 percent of a Native Alaskan's diet and is a central part of their culture and way of life.

In addition, many native families take part in commercial fishing which generates income for families around Bristol Bay. To ensure that the salmon fishery is a sustainable fishery, there are limited permits and a strict limit on catch. The fishery has been open to commercial fishing for almost 50 years, and each year, even with record catch numbers, more than 42 million salmon return to the Bay and its rivers to spawn.

However, a threat to the salmon and native communities looms on the horizon. A United Kingdom-based mineral company has proposed developing the world's largest open pit gold and copper mine at the headwaters of the Bay. This mine would threaten the health and well-being of the salmon, the native communities, and all that call Bristol Bay home.

Musings from Melanie Brown, Native Alaskan

Melanie Brown is an Alaskan native who was raised in Bristol Bay and is dependent on the Bay and its salmon. She, and many like her, have found God and the Holy Spirit in and around Bristol Bay.

"My mother, Katherine Brown, is from the Naknek River district of Bristol Bay and I have spent every summer of my life there. At the age of ten, I began participating in the commercial harvest of salmon with set-nets and was fortunate to know

my great- grandfather, Paul Chukan, who was still fishing when I entered the fishery. He was born not long after the commercial fishery began to be established in the Bristol Bay region. I revel in the knowledge that I am not the first to observe the rite of fishing for salmon in Bristol Bay. At the same time, it is not my intention to diminish or disrespect the formalized ritual of church service, but feel that the repetition, year after year, tide after tide, and fish after fish mark a pattern of action that has been recognized since salmon came into existence. It causes me to remember my grandparents and great-grandparents through an experience that I know we have shared. This shared custom continues back through the ages to ancestors unknown and it is my desire for the fishery to continue so far into the future that my descendents will no longer remember or know my name." -Melanie Brown

Melanie is thankful for the Bay, for the fishery, and for the bounty, strength, and tradition that they provide to her and her family. The gift of salmon that live in and are a part of Bristol Bay are the primary protein source for Melanie, her two kids, her parents, and extended family. By protecting the Bay, salmon will remain a way and a part of life for Melanie and future generations of Alaskan natives.

This Thanksgiving . . .

While Melanie, her family and many other Native Americans don't celebrate Thanksgiving, they do take time each and every year to give thanks for Bristol Bay, for the salmon, and for the bounty of God's Earth. This Thanksgiving, take a moment to remember where your food comes from. Be thankful for the people and land that helped provide it. And next time you have salmon, say a prayer for Melanie, her family, and the native communities around Bristol Bay. Pray that they will know the wealth and bounty of Bristol Bay for generations to come – until our descendents no longer know her name or ours.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Holy Spirit
For the bounty of the oceans
For the cycles and fruits of the land
And for the benefits of your gifts for our families, children and communities
We give thanks

For the native traditions of your land
The rite of subsistence fishing that has provided for generations
And our descendents who will inherit native traditions
We give thanks

For the beauty of creation
For those who came before us and
For our children and the earth they inherit
We give thanks to you Lord.
Amen

Email Tyler to receive a copy of National Geographic's article on Bristol Bay and the proposed mine to share with your congregation and your adult Sunday school class.

**Many thanks to the photographers who allowed us to use their work: Ben Knight, Lauren Oakes, Nick Hall, Robert Glenn Ketchum (in order of photograph's appearance)