

There Are No Indian Reservations in Heaven

God's heart is broken over the spiritual condition of the Native American community. Do you care?

I spent part of this week preaching at my friend Quentin Beard's church in Sioux Falls, S.D. On Sunday—which happened to be Pentecost—I reminded the congregation that if we really want the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we must have more than just emotionally charged worship, speaking in tongues or miracles of healing. Those things are wonderful, but if we want full-blown Pentecost we must also tear down racial and ethnic barriers.

Later that morning, a tall Native American brother named Joe Marrowbone came to the altar for prayer. He is from the Lakota Sioux tribe, and he wanted the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Within a few moments, he was praying in tongues with his hands raised in the air. He told me later that He feels God will send him to share the gospel on some of the Indian reservations near Sioux Falls.

Joe was especially blessed when I addressed the issue of racism among whites and Native people in his home state. I told the church that when we get to heaven, there will not be a white section, a Hispanic section, a black section or a Native section. "We are all one big family. There are no Indian reservations in heaven," I said.

Seeing Joe filled with the Spirit was a highlight of my trip. But when I left Sioux Falls, I was burdened about the condition of the Native people in our nation. We have so much unfinished business when it comes to healing the breach that exists between us and our American Indian brothers. Consider these facts:

- Native Americans have the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the United States. The poverty rate is 25 percent. Native people living in Indian country have incomes that are less than half of the general U.S. population.
- Only 36 percent of males in high-poverty Native American communities have full-time, year-round employment.
- Nearly 10 percent of all Native families are homeless. The rate of Native homes without electricity is 10 times the national average, and 20 percent of Native households lack running water. The infant mortality rate among Native people is about 300 percent higher than the national average.
- The poorest county in the United States is the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where the unemployment rate is at a mind-boggling 80 percent. Life expectancy on this reservation is the lowest in the Western Hemisphere, except for Haiti.
- Rates of violent victimization for both males and females are higher among American Indians than for any other race.
- From 1999 to 2004, American Indian males in the 15- to 24-year-old age group had the highest suicide rate compared to males of any other racial group.
- Native American men have been found to be dying at the fastest rate of all people in the United States.

What do those figures say to you? I believe it is an absolute travesty that those of us in the Christian community have not fully acknowledged our forefathers' role in perpetrating genocide on our Native brothers. And it is pathetic that we have largely ignored this languishing mission field in our own backyard while we spend millions on our tech-savvy megachurches in white suburbs. God forgive us.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared from the book of Joel that one sign of the Holy Spirit's outpouring would be the empowerment of the poorest of the poor. He said, "Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18, NASB).

Surely Native Americans were on God's heart when those words were recorded. Yet many of us completely missed the point of Pentecost. We made it about us. We chased after the anointing, the chills, the hype and the charismatic circus—forgetting that the reason we are anointed by the Spirit is to minister to those who need Christ's healing.

I am praying that the Spirit-filled community will renounce its self-absorbed immaturity and begin to fulfill our true Pentecostal mission. Pray for a spiritual awakening among Native people, both on and off the reservation. Explore ways that you can build bridges of reconciliation. And ask God how you and your church should respond to the needs of Native people.

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