

Devotion for Week of June 12, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

I was recently looking through a book I have about legends of the Cherokee people told by various storytellers from the Eastern Band of the Cherokees. I visited the reservation during seminary and met some of these storytellers and was fascinated with their stories. Kathi Smith Littlejohn tells this story about the origin of legends. Listen for some insight that parallels Old Testament Bible stories.

“We were just talking a little bit about what people did a long time ago. They didn’t have books, did they? They didn’t go to school, so they needed legends to teach people about different animals with stories and how things came to be and about the rules that everybody was supposed to go by so that they would treat each other with a lot of respect and take care of one another. That’s why we have legends.

I’m gonna tell you the first legend about how we got legends, because at one time there were no grandfathers. In fact, it was such a long time ago, there was a group of people that lived by themselves in the world with all the animals. And they could talk to one another, they could talk to the animals, and they had the same language, and everybody got along.

And then one day, as people will do, they started to fight. One thing led to another, and this person wasn’t talking to this person. Another thing happened, and this person pushed this person. Somebody wasn’t very nice to somebody, and somebody stole something from somebody, and they were really really angry at one another. So angry that they hit each other, and they were going to kill one another. The Creator didn’t like this at all.

And so he sent them – divided them up into groups of four – and sent one group to the north, one to the south, one to the east, and one to the west. All around the corners of the world. And once they got there, they were very confused, because they didn’t know how to live in this part of the world. They weren’t familiar with these things. They didn’t know where the water was. They didn’t know what kind of plants these were. They didn’t know how to get ready for the winter because they didn’t know what the winter was gonna be like.

So the Creator felt very sorry for them, and he wanted to help them, but he wanted them to learn their lesson. So he sent them a gift. He sent them dreams that told them about each of the animals, what to eat, what to do, what kind of plants they could use for medicine, and what kind of plants, if they ate them, would make them sick, how to catch that kind of fish, how to look at these different kinds of animals and use them.

So they began to learn, and they began to grow, and they began to live in their new home, and they got along with each other this time. Then he sent them another gift so they would never forget these things. He sent them legends, about all the animals and how to take better care of them and take better care of each other. And that’s how the legends came into the world.”

I’m reminded of Adam and Eve leaving the garden of Eden. And then the story of the Tower of Babel, with God making the people leave that place to spread out, be fruitful, and multiply. God watched over generations of our ancestors by speaking to them and sending visions and prophecies. And the Bible is full of their legends.

Jeanne