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Native

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Native

Abstract

"Native as a noun and an adjective. How and where do you belong?"

Posting about what it means to be "native" from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/native/>

Keywords

In All Things, native, nativity, nature, identity

Disciplines

Botany | Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Native

 inallthings.org/native/

Jeff Ploegstra

| NATIVE PLANTS

NATIVE (N.)-

“ONE OF THE ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OR LIFELONG RESIDENTS OF A PLACE.”

A common question from students while on a hike for “Flora of North America”—“Is that native or is it a weed?”

While seemingly straightforward, I am never quite sure what they mean by *native*. Or perhaps better stated, I am never quite sure that *they* know what they mean by native. They might simply mean the species has been present in the area since before European settlement. But if you accept the dichotomy they created, they might really be more interested in whether it is invasive, generally undesirable, and/or out of place. The question implies that “native” is in some measure desirable. It further implies that if it is not native, the only alternative is that it is undesirable. Is there then no other category?

Many plants have been planted in an area for a specific purpose. We do not generally consider garden plants or row crops to be weeds. Others, though clearly growing where they were not purposefully planted, have become naturalized and are good neighbors within the plant communities they are now a part of. Hopefully we do not see that plants existing in an area through human intervention are inherently undesirable.

A better question might be, “Does it belong here?”

| SIOUX CENTER NATIVE

NATIVE (ADJ.)- EXISTING IN OR BELONGING TO ONE BY NATURE; INNATE.

A visiting parent of a friend recently asked me if I am Sioux Center native. It prompted me to realize that I have now lived in Sioux Center longer than I have lived anywhere else in my life. My mother and her father were also born here. I certainly have some connections to this community.

Something however makes me hesitant to claim native status. I have formed strong friendships, begun raising children, invested in my workplace, served as a deacon in my church, learned much about the plants, animals, and insects that call this place home, endured and celebrated the seasons of this place; I have nurtured and been nurtured by this place. I am unsure if this is sufficient to be native.

There is much history here that I don’t know. There are a variety of practices that I haven’t adopted. There

are many ways in which I have not earned the right to speak into the life of this community, this home, this *oikos*¹ -system.

I am not sure how I stop being an immigrant. I am not sure that, even had I lived in a place for my whole life, I would be a native.

Who are the natives of *Sioux Center*?

| CHRIST'S NATIVITY

NATIVE (N.)- "ONE BORN IN OR CONNECTED WITH A PLACE BY BIRTH"

Christ was born to this place. He took on flesh. He became as we. He accommodated himself; he was shaped by the womb of his mother and the work of his father. At the same time, he changed everything—he embodied the perfect tension between becoming native and bringing transformation. How did he so perfectly navigate this space between being shaped and shaping?

Maybe it isn't in how long one has lived in a place, or whether one just naturally fits in, or whether one is born in a particular location. Maybe it is really about love. Love, so profound that you would give *everything*—that you would *live* and die for it all.

I am not sure I am *all-in*... but I want to be. I want to be at *home*. I want to be a part of an *oikos*-system. I want to love not *just* some people who happen to be in a particular place, I want to love the whole *system*—the plants, the animals, the birds, the people, the landscape, the relationships—to see it as more than the sum of its parts. I want to love all that God has made and called "very good"- to **shamar*² and *abad*... here in this place.

Here I am. I want to belong.

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Footnotes

1. *Oikos*-the root of ecology, economy, ecosystem—The greek equivalent of household or home. Also the name of Danon's greek yogurt line... ↩
2. In Genesis 2:15 the Hebrew verbs – 'abad' and 'shamar' – are used to describe the role of mankind with respect to the rest of the creation. 'Abad' can be roughly translated as "serve". As in, "... as for me and my household, we will serve (abad) the Lord."(Joshua 24:15) Shamar, means 'to protect' or 'to keep'. As in, "The Lord bless you and keep (shamar) you (Numbers 6:26). ↩

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