

The Wired Word
Sunday, September 18, 2016

Student Copy

Dear Class Member,

For some time now, there has been an ongoing dispute between a Native American tribe and an oil production company over property rights and land use. Amid clashes between protesters of the Dakota Access Pipeline and security personnel representing the company Energy Transfer Partners in North Dakota, a federal judge ruled September 9 against the Standing Rock Sioux tribe's request for a halt to construction of the pipeline. A day later, the departments of the Army, Interior and Justice issued a joint statement indicating that the Army Corps of Engineers will not grant permission to drill under the Missouri River until the corps has reviewed the case.

Then on Tuesday, September 13, the North Dakota National Guard, in conjunction with highway patrol officers, confronted protesters, some of whom had chained themselves to construction equipment in acts of civil disobedience. Several people were arrested, including journalists and medics.

This news story presents issues of fair and just distribution of resources, property rights and responsibilities, and conflicting priorities and values of different forces within a society. So for our next class, we will explore how Christians can navigate these often confusing and prickly matters.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.

The Wired Word invites us to contribute news story suggestions for upcoming lessons. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, post it to *The Wired Word* forum at <http://thewiredword.squarespace.com/>.

This Sunday.....

9:15am Sunday School

10:25am Worship with Puppet Show

11:30am Luncheon after Worship



Standing Rock Sioux and Other Tribes' Protest of Dakota Access Pipeline Temporarily Halts Construction

The Wired Word for the Week of September 18, 2016

In the News

On September 9, a federal judge denied a request from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to order the company Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) to halt construction of the partially completed controversial Dakota Access Pipeline. The following day, the departments of the Army, Interior and Justice issued a joint statement indicating that the Army Corps of Engineers will not grant permission to drill under the Missouri River until the corps has reviewed the case.

Then on Tuesday, September 13, the North Dakota National Guard, in conjunction with highway patrol officers dressed in riot gear, confronted protesters, some of whom had chained themselves to construction equipment in an effort to stop workers from continuing to bulldoze land they hold sacred. About 20 people were arrested, including journalists and medics.

Over Labor Day weekend, six tribe members, including one child, were bitten by dogs handled by security guards working for the Dakota Access Pipeline company. At least 30 were pepper sprayed, according to

tribe spokesman Steve Sitting Bear. Four security personnel and two dogs were also injured. Kandi Mossett, of the Indigenous Environmental Network, said the Native Americans are committed to "nonviolent direct action."

Members of 200 tribes from across the United States and Canada have flocked to the Dakota prairie land in increasing numbers since April to demonstrate solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux in what some call "the largest unification of Native American tribes in decades."

Jessie Weahkee of Albuquerque, who traveled 17 hours from Albuquerque with a truck full of supplies for the protesters living at the camp, told a reporter, "It's about our rights as native people to this land. It's about our rights to worship. It's about our rights to be able to call a place home, and it's our rights to water."

Calling themselves "protectors" rather than "protesters," the Standing Rock Sioux object to the 1,172 mile-long crude oil pipeline, claiming it crosses ancient burial grounds, significant tribal cultural sites, and waterways essential for their survival, including the Missouri River, the tribe's only source of water. Tribal leaders also argue that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers failed to fulfill their legal obligation under the National Historic Preservation Act to consult with them on a "government-to-government" basis before issuing a permit for the \$3.8 billion project.

According to a statement submitted to the court by tribal preservation officer Tim Mentz, the Standing Rock Sioux were only recently given permission to survey the private land in question. Less than 24 hours after the tribe provided the court with evidence of the presence of culturally significant artifacts on the land, the ETP began bulldozing a 150-foot-wide swath of topsoil two miles long in the disputed area.

Tribal Chairman David Archambault II lamented, "This demolition is devastating. These grounds are the resting places of our ancestors. The [artifacts] ... there cannot be replaced. In one day, our sacred land has been turned into hollow ground."

The 30-inch diameter pipeline, which is designed to carry about half a million barrels of crude oil per day from Western North Dakota's Bakken and Three Forks production areas through South Dakota and Iowa to the port city of Patoka, Illinois, is scheduled to be operational by the end of 2016. Almost all of the route is on private land. A federal permit is only required for the 3 percent of the pipeline that crosses waterways.

The ETP claims that shipping oil by pipeline is "more direct, cost-effective, safer and [more] environmentally responsible" than using trains or trucks. Supporters point to the creation of 8,000 to 12,000 local jobs during the construction phase, with increased tax revenue for state and local governments. The pipeline, which is 48 percent complete, is touted as an important part of a national security strategy to help reduce America's dependence on foreign imports of oil.

One of the activists told reporter Amy Goodman: "No one owns this land. This land belongs to the Earth. We are only caretakers. We're caretakers of the Earth. We win every day when we stand in unity. We stand, and we fight."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Dakota Access Pipeline Co. Attacks Native Americans with Dogs and Pepper Spray. *Democracy NOW!*](#)

[North Dakota Oil Pipeline Protest Turns Violent. *Denver Post*](#)

[Dakota Access Pipeline. *Energy Transfer Partners, L.P.*](#)

[The Legal Case for Blocking the Dakota Access Pipeline. *The Atlantic*](#)

[Protests Persist Over Dakota Access Pipeline. *Wall Street Journal*](#)

[Breaking: Riot Police Begin Mass-Arrests at Dakota Access Pipeline, FB Censors Video. *theantimedia.org*](#)

Applying the News Story

TWW team member Jim Berger, who served as a Presbyterian pastor in Petersburg, Alaska, from 1978-1993, working extensively for Native American rights, remarked: "This is a debate about Native American rights, mineral rights and spiritual traditions. Throw in water rights and the protection of water for the future generations and you have a free-for-all."

Alaskan tribes fought for decades for recognition of their land claims, Berger explained. The Alaska churches (Presbyterian and Episcopal) have been partners with the tribes in their fight for sovereignty over their lands.

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The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. As a way of viewing this struggle from the Standing Rock Sioux perspective, consider how you would feel if the Army Corps of Engineers bulldozed graves in Arlington National Cemetery to enable more people throughout the country to have a less expensive supply of heating oil? Or if your family plot were disturbed to make way for a business, nonprofit or infrastructure such as a highway? Would it make a difference to you *why* the land was commandeered? Why or why not?
2. What (if any) should be the role of the church in matters of land use, property rights and Native American legal claims?
3. When is "eminent domain" justified, and when is it just a legal form of stealing? Who decides when "eminent domain" should apply, and what factors should be considered in such decisions?
4. When it comes to your property, what "rights" do you consider "inviolable" or "inalienable," and why do you put them in this category?
5. People on both sides of the pipeline debate may believe in protecting the environment, yet arrive at very different conclusions about proper use of resources. What scriptures and biblical principles guide you in the way you think about these issues?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Genesis 13:5-12
Genesis 26:12-22
Deuteronomy 19:14
Deuteronomy 27:17
Genesis 31:44-55

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

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