

In our readings this morning, both Isaiah and Luke speak to the role of God's messengers in bringing peace, healing, and salvation. We are celebrating one such messenger today.

Today is Oakerhater Sunday and we are honoring an Oklahoma Saint. David Pendleton Oakerhater was a Cheyenne warrior who became an Episcopal deacon and ministered to the Cheyenne and Arapahoe tribes through the Whirlwind Mission in Watonga. Pat Gonzales, the current deacon for the Whirlwind Mission, keeps up what Saint David started so long ago.

As I said, David Oakerhater was a Cheyenne warrior and a respected leader within his tribe. However, he returned to his tribe as one preaching peace. Just as the messenger in Isaiah brought peace to a war-torn people, Oakerhater, once a warrior, became a messenger of Christ's peace to his people and beyond. He announced salvation to his people and let them know that God reigns over them and has redeemed them just as the Psalmist said.

When St. David established the Whirlwind Mission, it was as a day school for local tribal children. He wanted the children of his tribe to be educated but not taken away from their parents. Tribal mothers waited outside the school, cooking lunches for their children and families would eat together during the lunch break.

St. David had an innovative plan for the children of his tribe. Unfortunately, the school was closed in 1917. The church remained as did St. Oakerhater who continued to minister to the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe.

St. Oakerhater, aka as Making Medicine to his tribe, lived out the proscription that every Christian should follow as set out in James:

David Oakerhater knew that every perfect gift came from God and he preached that to his tribal members. He also was a doer of the word and not just a speaker. He worked to share his faith with the tribes that he served. He was able to baptize every member of his tribe, including his mother.

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples in pairs, with clear instructions to bring peace, heal the sick, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. St. Oakerhater's life as an Episcopal deacon is a powerful example of living out this commission.

First, he was a Peace-Bearer. St. Oakerhater's work was one of reconciliation and peace, healing the divides between his people and the broader society. He said to his tribe *““You all know me. You remember when I led you out to war I went first, and what I told you was true. Now I have been away to the East and I have learned about another captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is*

my leader. He goes first, and all he tells me is true. I come back to my people to tell you to go with me now in this new road, a war that makes all for peace.”

In addition to being a peace maker, Oakerhater was a healer. His ministry was not just spiritual but also practical, focusing on the physical and emotional healing of his community. Oakerhater’s ministry spanned education, pastoral care, and advocacy for his people, integrating his Native heritage with his Christian faith. He wanted his community to be safe and protected. He was a doer of the word.

Finally, as seen in the quote above, he was a Proclaimer of the Kingdom. Through his life and work, Oakerhater brought the reality of God’s Kingdom near to those he served.

David Pendleton Oakerhater shows us our role as modern disciples. We are called to bring peace, healing, and the message of God’s Kingdom to the world. We must be doers of the word.

How are we to be doers of God’s word?

How can we bring peace to our world? The first thing I would recommend is to PRAY. Pray for the peace of the world and peace in our own community. In addition to prayer, there are many ways to promote peace within a community. Things we can

do individually include developing and practicing listening and communication skills. Also, we need to build trust and search for common ground. Finally, we need to create opportunities for forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

Next, we are to be healers. We need to examine how can we support the emotional, physical, and spiritual healing of those around us. Pray for them and then do something to further your prayer. Something we can all do to assist in all types of healing is to be present. Being fully present with someone in their time of need—whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually—can be the most powerful form of support.

Finally, what is it we can do when we leave this space that proclaims the Kingdom of God?

Through our actions and words, we can make the Kingdom of God a tangible reality for those we encounter, and here are things we are already doing—donating time and money to outreach activities such as Laundry Love or Socks of Love, bringing clothes, shoes, and receiving blankets for Fostering Futures, feeding the unhoused monthly and many other things. We are already following the Saint's example of doing for others but there is always more to be done. Following Oakerhater's example of taking care of his community, his tribe, what can you do this week

Ann Murray
Oakerhater Sunday
September 1, 2024

to spread the Kingdom of God? Next week, I would like to hear what you did.

David Pendleton Oakerhater's life is a powerful witness to the transformative power of God's call. His journey from warrior to deacon shows us the possibility of redemption, peace, and mission in our own lives. As we reflect on the scriptures today, let us be inspired by Oakerhater's example to embrace our own call to be messengers of peace and bearers of God's Kingdom.

Amen.