

Proper 27A 2014 The Raven and the Seagull, John Shea*

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A Native American Creation Story

In the Beginning, God gave gifts to all the animals. To all the animals God gave gifts, and He gave the gifts in fancy, decorated boxes. And as soon as all the animals received their gifts, they opened up their boxes, and there tumbled out all of Creation: the trees tumbled out, and the plants tumbled out, and the rivers tumbled out, and the rocks tumbled out – everything tumbled out. And all of the boxes and gifts which God had given to all the animals were opened – except for the seagull's. The seagull took his box which God gave him and tucked it under his wing and said, "God gave **me** this box, I can do with it what I please, and I'm not going to give it to anybody or share it with anybody; I'm not going to open it – it's *my* gift, and He gave it to me." Well, although everybody else had opened their gift, and all Creation had tumbled out, they *knew* what was in the box of the seagull: for although all creation was out there, they could *see* none of it, for in the box of the seagull was the gift of light.

The fox came up to the seagull and said, "You have to open your gift! I have a burr in my tail, and I cannot get the burr out! I cannot see well enough to pull it out!" And the seagull said, "This is *my* gift; God gave **me** this gift, and I choose not to share it; I choose not to open it!"

The bear came up to the seagull and said, "My hibernation schedule is off; I do not know when to sleep and when to wake! You *must* open your gift which God gave you!" And the seagull said, "It is *my* gift, I can do with it what I please, and I choose not to open it." The deer came up to the seagull and said, "Can we talk privately? Yesterday I was romping through the forest with my children. I made a spectacular leap into the air – and I cracked my antler on a hanging branch because I could not see. My own children laughed at me! This is not right! You must open the gift that God gave you!" "It is my gift," said the seagull. "And God gave it to me. I am not going to open it."

Well the other animals did not know what to do, so they went to the cousin of the seagull, the raven, a notoriously tricky bird, and they lay before the raven their tale of woe. And the raven said, "Go home. I will see what I will do." And in the dead darkness that was creation, the raven flew until he sensed the presence of the seagull, and he plopped right down next to the seagull, and he said, "My cousin, the seagull!" Well when the seagull heard it was the raven, and knowing that the raven was a notoriously tricky bird, he took the box that God had given him, and shifted it from this side over to that side (away from the raven). But as he did so, he lifted his foot off of the ground just a little bit, and quickly the raven bent down and placed a thorn underneath the foot of the seagull. And when he shifted his foot back, the thorn pierced into the foot of the seagull, and the seagull yelped with pain! And the raven said, "What is it my cousin the seagull?" "I stepped on a thorn!" said the seagull. "Oh-h-h", said the raven, "that must be

painful, knowing how thin are the soles of the feet of the seagull! Why do you not pull the thorn out?" "I would," said the seagull. "But I'm afraid that if I bent down, I might lose my grip on the gift which God gave me; I might drop the box which God gave me!" "I would love to help you," said the raven. "But you see, I cannot see! If I could see, I would pull the thorn out of your foot. But I cannot see, so I cannot help you."

Well the seagull thought about this, and himself could see no way out, so he took the box which God had given him and cracked it open, just an inch. Whhhish! There came out of the box a string of light, and it climbed and climbed against the blackness and became a necklace of stars. And the raven looked out and could begin to see creation taking shape in the glimmer of the stars, and he said, "Ahhhhhhh!!!"

"The thorn?" said the seagull. "You said if you could see, you would pull the thorn out. You can see now." "So I can!" said the raven. And he bent down, but instead of pulling the thorn out, he pushed it in! And the seagull yelped with pain! And the raven said, "Oh, I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I could see well enough to touch the thorn. But because I couldn't see well enough to pull it out, I accidentally pushed it in! If I could see just a little better – just a little better! – I know, I know for sure, I could pull the thorn out of your foot."

The seagull thought about this, and could see no way out. And so he took the box, the gift that God had given him, and cracked it open just a little further, and Whhhish! There came out of the box a small, luminous ball, and as it climbed into the sky, it grew larger and larger until it took its place among the necklace of stars. And all of Creation shimmered in the light of the moon! And when the raven saw it he said "AHHHHHHHH!"

"The thorn?" said the seagull. "You said if you could see, you would pull the thorn out. Surely now you can see!" "So I can!" said the raven. And he bent down. But instead of pulling the thorn out, you know what he did. He pushed it in! And the seagull yelped with pain! And his wings flapped up in the air, and the box which God had given him fell from the tightness of his grip and cracked upon the earth and split. And out of it came a small bright ball, which as it climbed grew more and more fiery until it pushed back the moon and the stars and the blackness and all of Creation could be seen bathed in sunlight! And when the raven saw this, he said, "AHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

"The thorn?" said the seagull. "You said if you could see, you would pull the thorn out of my foot! Surely now you can see!" "So I can!" said the raven. And he bent down and pulled the thorn out of the foot of the seagull. And then he looked him in the eye and said, "Look!! Isn't this better?!!!!"

And that is why, down to this day, to remind us difficult it is to let the light that is within shine forth and illumine all creation; how difficult it is to release our tight

grasp on the gifts God has given us to bless one another, the seagull stands on one foot.

***This story is written in John Shea's excellent book *Starlight: Beholding the Christmas Miracle All Year Long*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 97-99, and is read by Fr. Shea on his cassette tapes, *Stories from Starlight*, ACTA Publications**