

“To Change The World...”

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UCC at The Villages, FL
Easter Traditional
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Luke 24:1-12; John 20:11-18; Luke 24:13-33^a; John 21:1-19; Luke 24:33^b-53

And they said to him,

*“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word
before God and all the people,
and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up
to be condemned to death, and crucified him.
But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.*

Luke 24:19^b-21

Let us pray.... O God,

As we claim our individual salvation by being followers of Christ
so you challenge us to transform and redeem our world.

As we have received forgiveness and love and affirmation from you,
so we recognize and affirm your continuing relationship with the Jewish people
as co-workers for that beloved community that is possible for all people.

We are born again to help change the world in fellowship with all people of goodwill.

Amen

Something happened 2,000 years ago that changed the world...

My minister told us in Confirmation class that the only thing
we really know for sure about Jesus Christ is that
he lived about 2,000 years ago
in the region of what is now Israel/Palestine and
something happened to change the world.

Something happened here the other night when we were treated to a Passover
Seder Meal hosted by our Jewish friends from Temple Shalom.

Preceding a great dinner catered by a local restaurant,
we were guided by readings of the Haggadah which symbolically
used food to tell the story of how the people of Israel came to Egypt,
became enslaved there and were ultimately rescued by God through Moses.

In those readings, we heard many teachings familiar to us as Christians that are also
important to the Jewish people – themes of liberation and transformation.

Our confidence is in the hope that learning more about our Jewish spiritual roots,
we are helped to become better Christians.

As our two congregations got together, it was also opportunity for our Jewish friends
to learn more about our faith tradition.

“Haggadah” literally means “The Telling”, or “The Story” which is told during
the Seder Meal, about the Exodus – the salvation history of the Jewish people.

Our Maundy Thursday Service recalls the events of the Passion –
the salvation history of the Christian people.

By the way, it’s “Maundy” and not “Monday”;

The word “Maundy” is derived from the Latin word, “mandatum”
which means, “commandment”.

Willard, p.2

This is a reference to the Great Commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5...

You shall love the LORD your God

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

When I said this, Laurie Duquette of Temple Shalom stood up and spontaneously began to sing a song based on this Hebrew Bible verse and she was joined by just about everybody from Temple Shalom. This would have been like all of us singing the Doxology.

It so happens that our Gospels link this Great Commandment with Leviticus 19:18^b – *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* and the verse that precedes Deuteronomy 6:5, is the Shema, which is very important in Jewish liturgy...

“Hear O Israel (Listen O People of God), The LORD our God is One...”

So, we celebrated *our* unity as people of God, showing forth our love as neighbors – Temple Shalom and the United Church of Christ at The Villages together.

A number of people from Temple Shalom stayed for our Maundy Thursday Service to observe our ritual of Holy Communion and hear the story of Jesus’ Passion. Just as we hoped to experience Judaism without fear of being converted, we provided an opportunity for them to learn just how important Judaism is to us as Christians, that they have good reason to be proud of their heritage as Jews.

The Maundy Thursday Service includes the Christian sacrament of Holy Communion which is a memorial and participation in Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples, followed by the Tenebrae Service.

The word “Tenebrae” means “Shadows” – which refers to the successive extinguishing of candles as the story of Christ’s “passion” is retold.

This is a somber service and I would be reciting my translations and paraphrases of those Gospel texts that would only take us as far as Jesus being sent out to be crucified.

Telling these stories with Jewish people present was taking a chance, because the cross to them means 2,000 years of persecution...

At the same time, we needed to be faithful to our story of who we are as Christians, so we couldn’t sugarcoat things – we had to hear these stories and dig into them for how the love of God must be there for us all.

I acknowledged to everyone that the rest of the Gospel story continues Easter Sunday with Jesus’ triumph over death through his Resurrection.

Willard, p.3

So, they didn't hear any of the narratives you heard today
of the women who found Jesus' tomb empty, but were told by angels
that he had risen from death and was alive.

They didn't hear about the men who dismissed this as wishful thinking,
but how two of them met Jesus himself on the road
and recognized him finally when they sat down to break bread together.

They didn't hear about how he spoke to Peter and to Mary Magdalene
to love and reassure and empower them as leaders of our faith.

They didn't hear how Jesus appeared to those disciples hiding in fear,
but led them out to bring the Good News of God's beloved community.

Yet that's our history – our story to remember and tell...

Nevertheless let us remember what Jesus said in the Gospel of John,
"Salvation comes from the Jews".

That Holy Thursday night, it was one of the Hebrew scriptures – one of the Psalms
that took us the rest of the way to that promise of salvation and transformation
through the imagery of Psalm 22
which Nancy Bell presented dramatically.

It begins with, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" –
which Jesus cried from the cross, and it concludes with the Divine Assembly
of God's Kingdom achieved as a beloved community
of justice prevailing over oppression, and the care for all who are in need.

This was a labor of love as we sought to come to terms with the difficult texts
that have been used to divide Christians and Jews through the centuries.

In re-interpreting these stories, resolving to be inclusive –
not only with regard to gender, but also how Jewish people are represented,
we hasten the day when all people –
Jewish & Gentile, black & white, Hispanic & Anglo, Native & immigrant,
male & female, gay & straight, pagan & Christian,
Muslim & infidel, theist & atheist
will all sit down together at the table as human beings to break bread
and drink that 4th cup of the Seder Meal, the Cup of praise & acceptance
with the One Who Is God...

Amen

Luke 24:13-35

- ¹³ That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us,
about seven miles from Jerusalem,
¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.
- ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing together,
Jesus himself drew near and went with them.
¹⁶ But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.
- ¹⁷ And he said to them,
"What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?"
And they stood still, looking sad.
- ¹⁸ Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him,
"Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem
who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"
- ¹⁹ And he said to them,
"What things?"
And they said to him,
"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word
before God and all the people,
²⁰ and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up
to be condemned to death, and crucified him.
²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.
²² Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.
They were at the tomb early in the morning
²³ and did not find his body; and they came back saying that
they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.
²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb,
and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."
- ²⁵ And he said to them,
"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that
the prophets have spoken!
²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things
and enter into his glory?"
- ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the prophets,
he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.
- ²⁸ So they drew near to the village to which they were going.
He appeared to be going further,
²⁹ but they constrained him, saying,
"Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."
So he went in to stay with them.
- ³⁰ When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed,
and broke it, and gave it to them.
- ³¹ And their eyes were opened and they recognized him;
and he vanished out of their sight.
- ³² They said to each other,
"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road,
while he opened to us the scriptures?"
- ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem;
and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them,
³⁴ who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!"
- ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

