

## “The Light By Night”

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Temple Shalom, FL  
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Exodus 14:8-9, 15-23

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak to you, as members and guests of Temple Shalom on this observance of remembering The Holocaust.

As a Christian minister and storyteller,  
it is not hard for me to see a connection between the story of Jesus Christ  
and the story of the Jewish people.

For both have been treated in the same way by the world –  
victims of that vicious cycle we human beings keep trying  
to impose upon each other of naming, blaming, and condemning.

Seems like there always has to be a scapegoat to take our attention away  
from the underlying power plays of human self-interest.

And the only way to break that cycle is through empathy –  
and to take up the cause of your enemy’s welfare.

But divisiveness serves to help those who are determined to hold onto  
their nickel’s worth of power.

So, they demonize any threat to that delicate balance –  
a threat that is in the form of someone who reminds us of our  
common humanity and are peacemakers.

This cruel cycle goes on,  
but because of what happened to the Children of God –  
to Jesus and to the Jews, we can recognize when the blame game  
is going on and we can stop it.

At least, we can stop participating in it ourselves.

On November 9-10, 1938, there was a widespread attack  
on Jewish homes and businesses throughout Germany,  
including the murder and imprisonment of many Jewish people

It was the beginning of the Holocaust called Kristalnacht –  
The Night of Broken Glass.

But the seeds of the weeds of the Holocaust were sown on May 10, 1933,  
when there was a book burning of ‘Un-German’ literature  
by college students who set fire to 25,000 books  
in a ritualized series of events featuring Nazi speakers  
who appealed for a return to morality and tradition.

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The books that were burned included titles by such authors as  
Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx,  
Andre Gide, H.G. Wells, Ernest Hemingway, Franz Kafka,  
Jack London, Leon Trotsky, even Helen Keller.  
And book burning – as we all know, still goes on  
in the name of morality, tradition – and God.

The threatened burning of a Qur'an – the holy text of Islam,  
what Muslims believe to be literally the Word of God  
spoken through the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Mohammad,  
took place at a Christian church in Gainesville by Christians.

The consequences of that event led to rioting by Muslims in Afghanistan  
where innocent UN peacekeepers from Europe and Nepal  
were murdered – sound familiar?

They were murdered for blasphemy.

How can murder 'in God's name' not be blasphemous?

Seems to me we all have to start working on trying to understand  
the difference between what is 'sacred' and what is 'blasphemous'.

We have to start teaching it by setting the example  
of respecting God in the sacred things of others.

It so happens that the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

of the publication of the King James Bible is tomorrow, May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

It is arguably the most influential book for the English language and culture  
giving us such phrases as:

*in the twinkling of an eye, swords into plowshares,  
my cup runneth over, no rest for the wicked,  
let not the sun go down on your wrath, holier than thou...*

By the way, King James of England considered the Pilgrims to be his enemies  
because of their goal to separate themselves

from the traditional church – and worldly authority, too.

The Pilgrims are the ancestors of the Congregationalists  
who became part of the United Church of Christ.

King James persecuted and harassed the UCC's ancestors into the New World  
as just another example in history of that vicious cycle at work.

I suppose we of the UCC as the historical descendants of the Pilgrims  
ought to be resentful of the King James Version –

and to be honest we prefer more modern translations.

Still the King James Bible is a beautiful translation, written to be read aloud.

And it is rumored that even Shakespeare himself had a role in editing it.

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Let me share with you part of a sacred story  
from the ancient scriptures of Judaism  
that have come to be precious to Christians, too,  
from the KJV translated by the oppressors of the Pilgrims,  
selected verses of Exodus 14 [Exodus 14:8-9;15-23]...

[8] And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt,  
and he pursued after the children of Israel:

and the children of Israel went out with an high hand.

[9] But the Egyptians pursued after them,  
all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army,  
and overtook them encamping by the sea,  
beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon...

[15] And the LORD said unto Moses,  
Wherefore criest thou unto me?

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:

[16] But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea,  
and divide it:

and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground  
through the midst of the sea.

[17] And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians,  
and they shall follow them...

[18] And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD...

[19] And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel,  
removed and went behind them;

and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face,  
and stood behind them:

[20] And it came between the camp of the Egyptians  
and the camp of Israel;

and it was a cloud and darkness to them,  
but it gave light by night to these:

so that the one came not near the other all the night.

[21] And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea;

and the LORD caused the sea to go back

by a strong east wind all that night,

and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

[22] And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea  
upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them  
on their right hand, and on their left.

[23] And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea,  
even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

But they got away and the Jewish people are still here  
and God is still speaking... Amen