

“This Is My Body”

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Genesis 22:1-14

Sura 37:100-111

Luke 22:7-20

*And he took bread, and when he had given thanks
he broke it and gave it to them, saying,
“This is my body...”*

Luke 22:19^a [RSV]

Let us pray... O God,

Teach us the ways of thanksgiving and peace

and that the only true sacrifice is the one that we make of ourselves –
just like you did.

Amen

Earlier this month, I attended the Network of Biblical Storytellers’ Festival Gathering in Washington, DC, where I had the opportunity to hear some wonderful storytellers tell Bible stories and to tell some myself.

This organization is dedicated to the preservation of reciting the Bible narratives as a spiritual discipline that is also entertaining.

I claim to be a Biblical storyteller myself since 1987 when I attended my first festival.

A few years later in 1989, this kind of storytelling got a strong affirmation, when public TV presented a series called “The Power of Myth” featuring Bill Moyers’ interviews of Joseph Campbell who taught comparative mythology at Sarah Lawrence College in NY.

Campbell is also credited for inspiring George Lucas who made the “Star Wars” and “Indiana Jones” movies based on Campbell’s theory of the “monomyth” – of the ‘hero’s journey’ which can be found in world cultures throughout all times and places.

Even Bible stories fall into this category of ‘myth’ in its best sense of using narratives to teach truth.

During his interview with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell spoke about the conflict in the Middle East as a competition between the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam who are stuck in their metaphors.

When Bill Moyers suggested they needed a new metaphor, Campbell said they needed their own metaphor ‘all the way’ –
Love thy enemy.

Willard, p.2

The theme for the week here at Chautauqua,
for the various aesthetic and cultural presentations
is “The Middle East: Now & Next”.

As we talk about the Holy Land, we must also consider the scandal
of unholy violence that has troubled not only that region, but the whole world –
and our shared, desperate need to find peace.

In my message for you today,
I am suggesting that one thing that needs to happen is
for each of these religious traditions
to reinterpret their metaphors in terms of the cultural context
of our present world.

You have heard three texts this morning from the Torah, the Qur’an,
as well as my Gospel paraphrase – all on the theme of “sacrifice”.
As a trained Protestant minister, I am able to speak with some authority
about how Christians understand the ‘Old and New Testaments’,
but not how rabbis interpret their Torah or imams their Qur’an.

I can say this much – as an outsider looking in, that the Jewish and Muslim stories
about Abraham being asked to sacrifice his child,
has great significance to these faith communities.

Whether that was Isaac in the Jewish tradition or Ishmael in the Islamic tradition,
both value this trial of Abraham in terms of putting devotion to God first.

Christianity also takes this view – with this additional perspective that Abraham
was ultimately spared from having to sacrifice his son,
while God was not spared from making such a sacrifice.

But if that is all the lesson we take away from this set of narratives,
then we are missing what may be the key for how these stories can apply, now.

In the familiar words of the installation of Holy Communion,
Jesus said, ‘This is my body...’

Without getting into a debate about transubstantiation,
it is understood that by saying, ‘*This* is my body...’,
he meant the breaking of bread to represent the sacrifice he would make.

But what if Jesus was saying that we must never again
shed blood as an act of sacrifice?

What if sacrifice had never been acceptable to God –
nor was it ever required by God?

What if Jesus came to show us that it is not God who requires blood,
but that it is we ourselves...?

What if the rejection of human sacrifice was more important to God
as the takeaway lesson in sparing both children of Abraham?

Willard, p.3

There is an anthropologist named Rene Girard who is arguably one of the greatest theologians of our time. Using concepts related to the cultural behavior of human beings he has described a vicious cycle of envious competition that leads to escalating violence, until a scapegoat is identified to be punished and even killed. This is called the 'single victim mechanism'.

Another form this takes is called the 'myth of redemptive violence' – which is a formula we can readily recognize in popular stories from westerns to cartoons.

A bad guy terrorizes the countryside until a hero rides into town on a white horse to kill the bad guy and restore peace.

The story of Christ can be interpreted this way – especially in Revelation, with Christ as the conquering hero who overcomes the powers of evil.

The only problem is in identifying who the 'bad guy' is – and a terrible example of how this mythic narrative goes wrong comes from current events.

Just weeks ago, nine black people attending a Bible study were killed by a white racist – who thought he was a hero for his cause.

Girard claims that there is a countermyth that can be found throughout the Judeo-Christian scriptures – beginning with Genesis and woven in through to Revelation, testifying that God is a God of nonviolence who works through forgiveness and love to overcome evil.

The naming, blaming, and shaming of scapegoats has its beginning when Adam said, "She did it" – perhaps a more logical 'original sin'.

King David who slew the giant Goliath as well 'thousands' of enemy soldiers in battle, was ultimately denied the privilege of building the Temple of Jerusalem because of his violent history.

The High Priest Caiaphas describes this mechanism when he predicts that Jesus must die for the sake of the nation, so that the whole nation of Israel will not be destroyed.

This comes about, but with the unexpected outcome that as the innocent Son of God was put on trial and crucified, this injustice was recognized by those who would face similar persecution and death.

Responding with forgiveness and love just as Christ did, this message and mission goes on.

Willard, p.4

Christians have a job to do –

to bear witness to God in terms of Christ

who taught about God's Kingdom as a beloved community;

just as the Jews must bear witness that God the Creator has a name

and that loving-kindness is the law of Moses we should all live by;

just as the Muslims must bear witness to

the message they received through their Prophet

to honor God and remember those who are poor.

Together, we can save the world.

The United Church of Christ has a job to do –

like shaking things up periodically to get people of faith

to use their heads as well as their hearts.

The recent UCC General Synod resolution calling for the divestment of corporations

that benefit from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands

has made it tough on local UCC congregations

in their relationships with the Jewish community.

The same pressure on UCC congregations happened in 2005

when a General Synod resolution called for churches to advocate

for gay marriage.

Our denomination is still feeling the effects of that decision

as churches had cut pledges to the national setting

and with some even leaving the UCC altogether.

But as we have seen, American society is changing to where the UCC already is

in what appears to be that proverbial 'right side of history'.

The world is changing, too, and bending towards human rights –

the liberation of women, people of color, and gender-specific people

who have been especially easy targets for the 'single victim mechanism'.

This quest for liberation is not going away no matter how virulent

the response is by terrorists, racists, fascists, and militarists

in their desperation.

Jesus said, "*This* is my body."

Use bread for your sacrifice if you must, and share it with others.

No more violence, for God's sake – and our own...

Amen

Genesis 22:1-14

[1] After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him,
“Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.”

[2] He said,
“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love,
and go to the land of Mori’ah,
and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains
of which I shall tell you.”

[3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his [donkey],
and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac;
and he cut the wood for the burnt offering,
and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

[4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes
and saw the place afar off.

[5] Then Abraham said to his young men,
“Stay here with the [donkey];
I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

[6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son;
and he took in his hand the fire and the knife.
So they went both of them together.

[7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham,
“My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.”

He said,
“Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

[8] Abraham said,
“God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”
So they went both of them together.

- [9] When they came to the place of which God had told him,
 Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order,
 and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.
- [10] Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
- [11] But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said,
 "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I."
- [12] He said,
 "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him;
 for now I know that you fear God,
 seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."
- [13] And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold,
 behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns;
 and Abraham went and took the ram,
 and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.
- [14] So Abraham called the name of that place
 The Lord will provide; as it is said to this day,
 "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Surah 37:100-111

- [Abraham said,]
- [100] My Lord, grant me a doer of good deeds.
- [101] So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son.
- [102] But when he became of age to work with him, he said:
 O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee:
 so consider what thou seest.
- He said:
 O my father, do as thou art commanded:
 if Allāh please, thou wilt find me patient.
- [103] So when they both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead,
 [104] And We called out to him saying,
 O Abraham,
 [105] Thou hast indeed fulfilled the vision.
 Thus do We reward the doers of good.
- [106] Surely this is a manifest trial.
- [107] And We ransomed him
 with a great sacrifice.
- [108] And We granted him among the later generations (the salutation),
 [109] Peace be to Abraham!
- [110] Thus do We reward the doers of good.
 [111] Surely he was one of Our believing servants

Luke 22:7-20

[7] Then came the day of Unleavened Bread,
on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

[8] So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying,
“Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.”

[9] They said to him,
“Where will you have us prepare it?”

[10] He said to them,
“Behold, when you have entered the city,
a man carrying a jar of water will meet you;
follow him into the house which he enters,
[11] and tell the householder,

“The Teacher says to you,
Where is the guest room,
where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?”

[12] And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready.”

[13] And they went, and found it as he had told them;
and they prepared the Passover.

[14] And when the hour came,
he sat at table, and the apostles with him.

[15] And he said to them,
“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;
[16] for I tell you I shall not eat it
until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

[17] And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said,
“Take this, and divide it among yourselves;

[18]for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine
until the kingdom of God comes.”

[19] And he took bread, and when he had given thanks
he broke it and gave it to them, saying,
“This is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

[20] And likewise the cup after supper, saying,
“This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

Inspired by Luke 22:7-20

AND THE DAY CAME

FOR ‘THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD’

ON WHICH THE PASSOVER LAMB WAS TO BE SACRIFICED.

AND JESUS SENT OUT PETER THE ROCK AND JOHN, SAYING,

“GO PREPARE THE PASSOVER FOR US TO EAT TOGETHER.”

BUT THEY SAID TO HIM,

“WHERE DO YOU WANT US TO PREPARE IT?”

THEN, HE SAID TO THEM,

“OY, LOOK HERE,

AS YOU ENTER THE CITY, YOU WILL MEET

A MAN CARRYING A WATER JAR.

FOLLOW HIM INTO THE HOUSE THAT HE ENTERS,

AND SAY TO THE LANDLORD THERE,

‘THE RABBI SAYS TO YOU,

“WHERE IS THE LODGING FOR ME TO EAT

THE PASSOVER WITH MY DISCIPLES?’”

IT MUST BE A LARGE, FURNISHED UPPER-ROOM.

PREPARE THAT PLACE.”

SO, THEY WENT OUT,

FINDING IT JUST AS JESUS HAD SAID TO THEM;

AND THEY PREPARED FOR PASSOVER...

AND WHEN THE TIME CAME,

JESUS AND THE OTHERS RECLINED TO EAT

WITH THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SENT AHEAD.

AND JESUS SAID TO THEM, PASSIONATELY,

“I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS PASSOVER,
TO FEAST TOGETHER WITH YOU BEFORE I SUFFER.
I SAY THIS TO YOU BECAUSE I WILL NOT EAT SUCH AS THIS AGAIN
UNTIL IT IS MADE REAL IN THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF GOD.”

AND HE TOOK ELIJAH’S CUP IN HIS RIGHT HAND, GAVE THANKS, AND SAID,
“TAKE THIS AND SHARE IT WITH ONE ANOTHER.

I SAY THIS TO YOU BECAUSE I WILL NOT DRINK
OF THE FRUIT OF THE VINE FROM NOW UNTIL
THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF GOD COMES TO BE.”

AND TAKING SOME BREAD, HE GAVE THANKS;

BREAKING THE BREAD, HE GAVE IT TO THEM, SAYING,

“THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOUR SAKE.

DO THIS TO REMEMBER ME.”

AND AFTER THE MEAL, HE TALKED ABOUT THE CUP IN THE SAME WAY,

“THIS CUP IS A PROMISE TO YOU FOR RENEWAL
THROUGH THE SHEDDING OF MY BLOOD...”