

ZION HERALD – MAY 2017

We are a congregation that strives to be an inviting, faithful, and growing presence in our community and in our world, with a passion for living and spreading the love of Jesus Christ by using our spiritual and material gifts in the service of all God's people



May 07	10:00 am	WORSHIP - EASTER 4	Ethiopian Comes to Believe (Acts 8:26-39)
May 14	10:00 am	WORSHIP - EASTER 5	Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-18)
May 21	10:00 am	WORSHIP - EASTER 6	Living by Faith (Galatians 1:13-17; 2:11-21)
May 28	10:00 am	WORSHIP - EASTER 7	One in Christ (Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29)
May 29	7:00 pm	COUNCIL MEETING	
Jun 04	10:00 am	WORSHIP PENTECOST	(Acts 2:1-4; Galatians 4:1-7)

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

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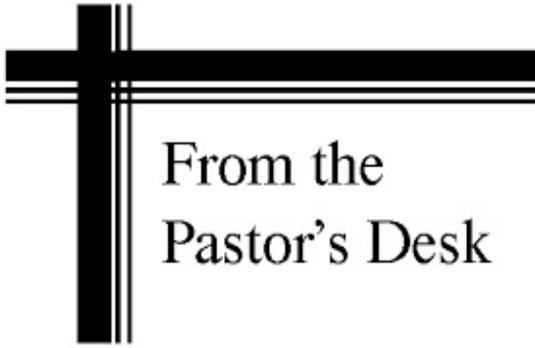
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From the Pastor's Desk

We have just celebrated the miracle around which Christian life revolves: the death and resurrection of Jesus. It makes one wonder if we are truly ready to embrace a Jewish Jesus.

Jesus is seen as a Jew in many pulpits and pews, but usually as an exception, an anomaly. In too many sermons, commentaries and hymnals his teachings on love, inclusion and forgiveness are set up as a contrast against the Jews and Judaism of his day. What makes him distinctive, we say, is that he's not like the other Jews. He reached people on the margins. He talked to women. He ate with sinners and tax collectors. But these characterizations of a Jewish Jesus are still distorted. Dr. Amy-Jill Levine explains why:

"Jesus becomes the rebel who, unlike every other Jew, practices social justice. He is the only one to speak with women; he is the only one who teaches nonviolent responses to oppression; he is the only one who cares about the "poor and the marginalized" (that phrase has become a litany in some Christian circles). Judaism becomes in such discourse a negative foil: whatever Jesus stands for, Judaism isn't it; what Jesus is against, Judaism epitomizes the category."

Yes, Jesus reached out to all kinds of people. Yes, he counselled mercy and patience. Yes, he healed and set people free. But rather than see Jesus as different from the Jews around him, it is time to see Jesus' ministry as a natural evolution of the whole history of Jewish teaching, ethics, morality, practice and service of God. Otherwise he serves as an archetypal anti-Jew.

Let's think about it for a moment. If Jesus were fully Jewish, operating in a Jewish context, living a Jewish life, studying Jewish texts, praying to a Jewish God, clothing himself in the Jewish commandments, where else did it come from? If we believe that Jesus was one with the God of Israel, then surely, Jesus drew upon the same Source and sources that inspired all the other teachers, miracle-workers, prophets and kings that preceded and surrounded him. Quite often the rabbis of his era were arriving at the same conclusions he was, from the Golden Rule, to teachings on Sabbath, the importance of love of God and neighbor. Others were engaged in calling disciples, healing and miracle-working. Even his interactions with women, children, and Gentiles were not anomalous.

More than that, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is marked by theological and behavioral leaps, beginning with Abraham's innovation that God is one, not many; continuing with Moses' skilled but previously unknown leadership in leading the Israelites from slavehood to peoplehood; game-changing visions from prophets; and the courageous renewal of Judaism under Nehemiah and Ezra after the return from Babylonian exile. Jesus is the product of generations of Jewish innovators, completely in line with the spiritual genius that went before him and even those that came after him.

If we were to truly embrace a fully Jewish Jesus, it would take a renewed scholarship, prayers, poets, professors and Bible study writers and teachers. It would take some work to leave behind comfortable but dishonest dichotomies and ready stereotypes – not that easy for already overworked church leaders. But there are many excellent resources that can help, for example, “The Jew Named Jesus” by Rebekah Simon-Peter. It’s worth the effort. We are grand participants in a historic reconciliation, the fruits of which are only beginning to be realized.

This historic reconciliation points out an underlying truth: it hasn’t always been good between Christians and Jews. A long history of Christian teaching of “contempt of the Jews” made positive interfaith relations all but impossible for centuries. After hitting a theological bottom in the Holocaust, though, the church has intentionally hammered out new theologies and reached for new understandings that allow for love, acceptance and embrace of Jews. In response, Jews have done the hard work of forgiving and rapprochement too.

All of this brings us to the point where we can ask the question: Can we truly embrace a fully Jewish Jesus? Even the question is a good one. It leads to all kinds of other interesting questions. If Judaism and Christianity could hammer out a new relationship, is the same possible for Christianity and Islam? If we could, should we?

The truth is, the work has begun. And it’s been initiated by Muslims. In 2007, 138 Muslim clerics and scholars representing every branch of Islam sent a beautifully worded and carefully researched letter to Christian leaders. This letter, “A Common Word Between Us and You,” stated that as the two largest world religions, the peace of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. It used as its reference point the Hebrew Bible teachings of love of God and neighbor, saying they were common to both Islam and Christianity.

We have the opportunity to turn a new page. To restore and revamp our understandings of Jesus and Judaism, and to open our hearts to new understandings of our Muslim neighbours. What a great response to the Easter season this would be. They’re certainly risky moves, especially in an age of nationalism, terrorism, and blame-game politics. But isn’t that when the resurrection is needed most?

OLIVE BRANCH UPDATE

Deborah, Putiyei, and Serianne joined us for worship on Easter. This was followed by refreshments (provided by Ginette McCracken) and a time for fellowship. Deborah gave us an update on our Zion Home family. Many have moved on to post secondary education and dream of becoming a doctor, a human rights lawyer, and educator. We can all take pride in the results of our support of the Olive Branch since 2006. What we are providing our Zion Home children is a new life filled with love and hope. Venus and Mickford Durgana presented the Olive Branch with a cheque for \$250 from Venus’ employer which Venus and Mickford matched for a total of \$500. Thank you Venus and Mickford!

The 12th Annual Gala held on April 7 was a great success, raising more funds than last year which was one of our best. Many more donations were received this year. Pastor Linda, Sara and Alan Douglas, Ed Strath, Nick and Ingrid Beck, Mickford and Venus Durgana attended. Alethia purchased a ticket and planned to attend but unfortunately had to change her plans to attend a

funeral in Jamaica. A great evening was had by all.

Ginette McCracken and Alan Douglas were nominated and received City of Vaughan Volunteer recognition awards for their work for the Olive Branch. Congratulations!

Deborah, Putiyei, and our beautiful Serianne will be returning soon to Tanzania. We send our love and blessings and look forward to hearing about all the great work that they are doing. They are our hands, our feet, and our heart where we cannot be.



Celebrating Sibling Day - April 10
Our Zion Home Family

2016 Zion Council

Nick Beck (Chair) Wayne McCracken (Vice Chair) Mickford Durgana
Ginette McCracken Alethia McIntosh Ed Strath

Non-Council Positions

Ingrid Beck (Treasurer) Brian Cartwright (Recording Secretary)