

Weekly Teaching

April 7, 2017

Over the years, Reverend Lemler and I have had the opportunity to teach many classes together, and we've reached the point where we can often finish each others' sentences. This was especially apparent this week as we taught a joint presentation on Passover and Easter.

Together we will celebrate the first night of Passover with a Shalom Center Interfaith Seder, where we will be able to connect in our own special way with a feast of remembrance, freedom and hope.

Beginning with our Israelite spiritual ancestors, Jews imagine the many generations of our People who have celebrated the Seder. Sitting with our own children, grandchildren, family and friends, we feel rooted in our Jewish heritage, and imagine the future Jewish generations who will join the narrative of our People.

For Christians, they too embrace with reverence and respect, the Passover Seder. They embrace the historical reality that Jesus of Nazareth and the early Christian disciples celebrated Passover. And, while Gentile influences distanced early Christianity from its Jewish roots, it never severed the chord.

Today, Christianity recognizes how the experience of the Exodus for the Jewish People also became translated as part of the story of Jesus that creates the Christian narrative.

The Hebrew name Pesach (Passover) specifically became attributed to Easter. Most languages, other than English, use the root of Pesach for what English speaking Christians call Easter. And, even in English, the Easter feast is called the "Pascal Feast."

The universal theme of redemption is pervasive in both Passover and Easter. The Hagaddah is the "re-telling" of our Exodus story. The seder meal and seder rituals are a lesson plan on Exodus by which we "eat our history."

For example:

- Matzah—the bread of poverty and the bread that reminds is of leaving Egypt in haste.
- Bitter Herbs—the bitterness of slavery.
- Haroset— looks like brick mortar, but we can taste the sweetness of liberation.

Within our Judaism we recall our story; we connect ourselves to our past; Avadim Hayinu—"We were slaves in Egypt."

Christianity parallels our Jewish narrative with its own narrative; redemption of all people through "God's action of resurrection." The Easter Vigil proclaims: "this is the night when you brought our fathers, the Children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land..." Then the association with the Exodus narrative is transitioned to the Christian narrative on resurrection, "this is the night when we are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life... Come ye faithful, raise the train of triumphant gladness. God hath brought his Israel into joy from sadness. Loose from Pharaoh's bitter yoke... Led them with unmoistened foot through the Red Sea waters."

St. John of Damascus wrote in the 8th century: "Now the queen of seasons, bright with the day of splendor, with the royal feasts of feasts, comes its joy to render, comes to glad Jerusalem, who with true affection welcomes..."

Passover and Easter; each unique; yet also common in theme. Holidays when both Jew and Christian sings "go down to Moses, go down into Egypt land... let my people go." We hear our own story, but we can also realize it's our "sister's" story as well.

Our Sholom Center Seder on Monday night lives up to the prayerful declaration: "Let all who are hungry and needy come and eat." Jew and Christian; children of God; God certainly will be very pleased this holy season!!

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Passover to our fellow Jews, and a Peaceful Sabbath and Happy Easter to our Christian siblings. May our entire world see redemption and peace.

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com