

Weekly Teaching

November 10, 2017

Last week, there was a religious service held in Germany, in the town of Wittenberg to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

In 1517, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg's All Saints' Church. Martin Luther asserted that Christians could not buy or earn their way into heaven but only enter "by the grace of God." Luther's criticism led to a split with the Roman Catholic Church, and the birth of Protestantism.

The Reformation caused major changes in the world including significant negative consequences. Centuries of wars and persecution followed post-Reformation. On the positive side, seeds from the Reformation were planted that eventually would help grow the possibilities for greater religious freedoms for all. And, within Christianity, Protestants and Catholics eventually would learn to co-exist with each other peacefully.

Recently, the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican released a joint statement whereby they begged forgiveness for the violence waged.

"We begged forgiveness for our failures and for the ways in which Christians have wounded the Body of the Lord and offended each other during the 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation until today."

Further, they accurately noted that while the historical reality of past events cannot be changed, it's possible that the long-lasting influence of the Reformation can serve as a catalyst by which the world might embrace hope and overcome continued divisions that exist among our human family.

I personally retain this similar hope, but I also continue to feel the pain inflicted upon the Jewish People both by the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church.

On November 9, my feeling of ambivalence about the 500th anniversary of the Reformation came to a head.

My dear friend, Monsignor Alan Detscher, had invited me to join him at Saint Catherine of Siena Church for a service that he had organized: "From Conflict to Communion -- Together in Hope—A Common Commemoration of the Reformation." However, on this same evening, at Temple Sholom, we were also observing a sacred commemoration, the 79th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*—the Nazi Night of Broken Glass.

Fred Behrend, a 90-year-old Holocaust Survivor and author, spoke about his family's escape from Nazi Germany to Cuba, and about starting a new life in the United States. Fred was a child at the time and also discussed his first-hand experience of *Kristallnacht*.

It struck me that in commemorating the 500th year of the Protestant Reformation that we also are recalling Luther's realization that he was going to be unable to convert the Jews to his version of Christianity, and subsequently unleashed a tirade of anti-Semitic writings. Luther asserted that synagogues, Jewish schools and Jewish homes should be set on fire. And, Jews should have their assets confiscated, forced into labor and ultimately expelled. Luther's texts were commonly utilized by the Nazis.

Today, in the German town of Wittenberg there still remains an anti-Semitic sculpture on the facade of a church which depicts Jews suckling the teats of a pig while a rabbi gazes under the pig's leg and tail.

The Commemoration service at St. Catherine's was intended to note how the seeds of hope were planted by the Reformation, yet, the simultaneous commemoration of *Kristallnacht* was a vivid reminder of the human led

plague that served as a Locust-like consumption of societal hope. Perhaps the mitzvah of remembrance was best served by both services happening at the same time. I chose to attend parts of each.

Ultimately, each of us has a responsibility to determine how best to remember, and then move forward in the Godliest direction as possible. By understanding history—blemishes and all—we can move forward together and discover greater levels of mutual understanding and respect for peoples of all different faiths.

It was in this spirit that the Sholom Center for Interfaith Learning and Fellowship was created.

Our Sholom Center isn't simply about learning and dialogue. Its most important goal is to create meaningful relationship grounded upon true and loving friendship. Together, we all can walk upon our own unique pathways up God's Holy Mountain. Should we stumble, our friend walking next to us can help hold us up, and we can do the same for them. And, in gratitude we can appreciate the strides we have taken together, and dedicate ourselves to further growth upon our holy journey.

On November 21 at 7:00 pm at Temple Sholom, our Sholom Center will host the Annual Thanksgiving Interfaith Service offered by the Greenwich Fellowship of Clergy (GFC). Please join us at this service and bring your family and friends.

It's important to not just "talk the talk," but to "walk the walk" and show in physical presence that we are committed to each other and the beautiful diversity that we hope to continue to nurture among peoples of all faiths.

Together, as we celebrate our national expression of Thanksgiving, let's further strengthen the bridge between our fellow members of our human family, and in crossing this bridge together make our holy journey by which we all become closer to God.

Shabbat Shalom,

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