

“Jesus, The Rebel”©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
April 16, 2017

What made Jesus unique and therefore memorable, was that he was not the usual kind of heretic. He was an “ethical eschatologist.”

*(1) He preached about social change; and,
(2) He spoke of the kingdom of heaven on earth.*

Gathering Music *He Sent His Son*, M. Gabbot Olga Kalinina
Jesus is All the World to Me, W. Thompson

Sounding of the Gong

Welcome Dan Brill, Board of Trustees

Prelude *April* (from *The Seasons*), P.I. Tchaikovsky

Chalice Lighting & Bell
(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)

Opening Words Rev. Lloyd

At last, we are here. After a long winter, we can say enthusiastically and without second thought, alleluia! Alleluia, spring is here in all her glory. New life begins, the earth and its creatures are resurrected from their dens of hibernation and dark slumber. Spring is here, long live spring, long live the rebirthing of life into new and creative forms. Long live majestic love that calls us out of our shells, out of our tombs, into new ways of being and sacrifice for others. Let the husks of our shells crack wide open in celebration of our place in humanity, our place in nature, our place in the universe. Awake, awake, rejoice, live life, live life fully, live life together, live life now. Alleluia, we are called to live life with reverence for that which calls us forth in creativity and love. Hallowed be, blessed be, and Amen!

#*Opening Hymn #269 *Lo, The Day of Days is Here*

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

Please come forward to the lectern as you are able. Or, we will bring a mic to you, as needed.

PAUSE

These words from Richard Gilbert:

A Tomb Is No Place to Stay - Richard Gilbert¹

A tomb is no place to stay,
Be it a cave in the Judaeen hills
Or the dark cavern of the spirit.

A tomb is no place to stay
When fresh grass rolls away the stone of winter cold
And valiant flowers burst their way to warmth and light.

A tomb is no place to stay
When each morning announces our reprieve,
And we know we are granted yet another day of living.

A tomb is no place to stay
When life laughs a welcome
To hearts that have been away too long.

Let us reflect with reverence in our hearts for the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

Musical Meditation: *Largo from Clavier Concerto No. 5, J.S. Bach*

Offertory Words

By our presence here today, we come seeking in each other new understandings of how to be with one another in this world. Let us now take up an offering that will support the efforts of this congregation and its members, as together we seek to find new paths to promote healing and health, love and justice.²

Offering & Offertory Music *Alleluia from Mozart's Exsultate Jubilate*

¹ <http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/2001-02/20020331.html> April 19, 2014

² Rev. Jeanne Lloyd.

Sermon *Jesus, The Rebel*

Rev. Lloyd

We are once again at that hinge-point of the year, that crux, that angle, between winter and summer, between misunderstandings and knowledge, between cool darkness and warm light, between Passover and Easter. And, in this place of in-betweenness we recall one who also lived in a place between confidence and doubt, one who tried to find a better way. We recall, for these few moments, the life of Jesus. Not Jesus as Christ, the divine; but Jesus the man, the human, the son of humanity, the historical being that sought to offer his people a different perspective, a changing point of view, wisdom to hold onto in moments of harsh and violent Roman rule.

Born in obscurity, the real day-to-day life of this man was never meant to be captured for historical archives.³ The poor and average person does not often have their life recorded for the generations, at least not 2000 years ago. If he lived in this day and age, he would have his own website, a blog, and a few million ‘friends’ on Facebook and Twitter. Then, as well as now, our lives, our stories, can only be and will only be told ultimately by others.

But, no historical documents about his life in the time of his life have survived to this time. Instead, we now live with stories that approach mythology. Remember the meaning of the word myth? A myth is a story we think is true, but not necessarily true. They are the stories we tell ourselves to help us make sense of life. After these many years, it can be hard to find the man within the haystack in which his truth has fallen.

This much, I’m pretty sure about. Jesus was a heretic, a revolutionary, a prophetic presence to a people suffering under harsh Roman rule. And, he was also a spiritual leader to those that had ears to hear. But, his intent was not, I repeat not, to create a new religion.⁴ It was to reform his own beloved Judaism, so that its leaders could see the forest and the trees, so that they and others would receive the life sustaining call of G*d⁵ toward reverence.

His intent was that those without power not be abandoned and marginalized by rigid laws and dogma, but that the laws be humanized to allow for a loving G*d to come into

³ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

⁴ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

⁵ Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, “G*d,” because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding . . .

full relationship with not only the Hebrews but with all people. This was the new testament.

I wonder if he knew then the phrase, "be careful what you ask for!" He meant only to reform Judaism. I do not believe he meant to have those that came after him, use his teachings and the story of his life to create a church that would at times, imprison and punish the hearts and minds of those already pushed to the edges.

PAUSE PAUSE PAUSE

How many of you have been to the Universalist Church of West Hartford? Then you will remember the large stain glass window of Jesus on the chancel. In it, Jesus has to be at least 12-14 feet tall. I remember, an orientation class in that church, introducing newcomers to Unitarian Universalism. One man said to the minister in a worried tone, "I was Catholic, but since arriving here, I instantly feel at home. But, my wife was raised Jewish, how ever will I get her past that Jesus?" The minister said, with all sincerity, "You do know that Jesus was Jewish?"

And, there it is, the turning on its head of our assumptions.

So let's study Jesus, the human being, who was Jewish; the historical Jesus; rather than the Jesus that was converted by others (after his death) to Christianity. Jesus was born, lived, taught, and died as a Jew. In Matthew 5:17, the author writes that Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or prophets (of Judaism), I have come to fulfill [God's law]." ⁶ He taught in the sacred temple, the one place on earth where G*d, the one G*d, was understood to touch earth. ⁷ Jesus was a follower of the G*d he understood. Not only did he never say he was G*d, he never said he was the son of G*d, ⁸ although he referred to G*d as his father. It is reported that he did say that he was the son of Man, ⁹ of humanity. But, nothing in anything ever written about the **historical** Jesus has ever supported the notion that Jesus thought he was G*d's equal. A faithful follower, a son as one is a son to a father of wisdom, yes; but never G*d's equal. Surely, if he had a grave to turn in, he would have done so at the thought that we mere humans had elevated a follower and devoted servant of G*d to the status of G*d. Perhaps that is why he left his tomb?

⁶ "From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians." Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

⁷ "From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians." Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

⁸ Achtemeier, Paul J. Bible Dictionary (Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1996) 1051.

⁹ Achtemeier, Paul J. Bible Dictionary (Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1996) 1053.

PAUSE

I turn your attention at this time to our Fifth Principle: “The Right of Conscience and the Use of the Democratic Process . . .” In particular, I want to focus in on “the right of conscience”. The word “conscious” is a slippery thing to grab on to, much like the words mind, heart and soul, though we often think we know what they mean. The dictionary says “conscious” refers “to an individual sense of recognition of something within or [outside of] oneself. It implies to be awake or awakened to an *inner realization* of a fact, a truth, or condition.”¹⁰ Jesus saw within his own faith tradition a marginalized people who were being manipulated by those in politically and religiously powerful positions. He saw Roman leaders who were quick to eliminate heretics and troublemakers in order to suppress rebellion. And, he saw religious leaders quick to work out with the Roman powers that be, collaborative arrangements to preserve their own religious authority within a harsh system that left the people suffering.¹¹

There were all types of heretics in those days¹², but in seeking relief from this top-down, life stealing, heavy handed oppression, most of them could only seek psychic escape in the promise of an “apocalyptic event where [G*d] would finally solve injustice, totally eradicate evil, [and promise immortality for his followers]”¹³. The kind of heretic that espouses this world view is called an “apocalyptic eschatologist.” It is when a catastrophic event occurs to solve the world’s problems.”¹⁴ The word “apocalyptic” refers to the “catastrophic event” and the word “eschatology” refers to “the end of times.”¹⁵ What made Jesus unique and therefore memorable, was that he was not the usual kind of heretic. He was an “ethical eschatologist”.¹⁶ To the common people he taught two principles¹⁷: (1) He preached about social change; and (2) he spoke of the kingdom of heaven on earth. He taught that “the demand that God is making on us is

¹⁰ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/conscious> April 19, 2014

¹¹ “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹² “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹³ “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹⁴ “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹⁵ Achtemeier, Paul J. Bible Dictionary (Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1996) 302.

¹⁶ “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹⁷ “From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.” Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

that we, humanity, should do something about evil and injustice in this world.”¹⁸ (This is the historical Jesus that our Unitarian and Universalist ancestors revered.)

PAUSE

Into the high pitched politically charged and chaotic environment of Passover, a time where the city was full of strangers and animals for sacrifice,¹⁹ into this time Jesus rode his donkey, and by his presence threatened the fragile stability of the city. By his choice, he consciously walked into the temple, and overturned the table of the money changers to name these facts as his conscious led him to believe:

- (1) That when the money changers control the temple, reverence for G*d is lost.
- (2) The Hebrew God, the great “I am” supersedes Caesar, and the pagan gods of Rome.

And, so he was crucified, mocked for being “King of the Jews”.²⁰ To those that executed him, he was but one more Jew among thousands killed by the Romans.²¹ But to the Jews that followed Jesus he was the one who offered a new way of looking at things in the midst of misery and suffering. He offered them a new angle of vision, and new way to reframe their understanding of their own world, their place in it and their relationship to it.

Jesus spoke and people followed. They followed because something he was saying was awakening in them an inner realization of a fundamental truth. He offered them a way out – not just in the hereafter – but more importantly in the present, by offering them ethical ways by which to treat one another, by which to love one another. He challenged them to think differently, to change their own behavior, while also challenging the powerful to change their ways.

The stain glass window of Jesus in the West Hartford church is a depiction of Jesus when he was preaching the Sermon on the Mount. He said to a people starving for spiritual sustenance, these words:

¹⁸ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

¹⁹ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

²⁰ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

²¹ *“From Jesus to Christ, The First Christians.”* Frontline, 1998, WGBH Educational Foundation, Public Broadcasting System.

Blessed are..²²

....the poor in spirit: for *theirs* is the kingdom of Heaven. (5:3)

....those who mourn: for *they* will be comforted. (5:4)

....the meek: for *they* will inherit the earth. (5:5)

....those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for *they* will be filled. (5:6)

....the merciful: for *they* will be shown mercy. (5:7)

....the pure in heart: for *they* will see God. (5:8)

....the peacemakers: for *they* will be called children of God. (5:9)

....those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven.

When his disciples asked, “When will the kingdom come?”, the Gospel of Thomas says that Jesus said, “It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying here it is or there it is. Rather, the kingdom of the father is spread out on the earth, and the people do not see it.”²³

Jesus spoke his conscious. He tried to help both the powerful and the poor see G*d’s love. He offered as guiding principles the value of charity, the simplicity of life, service to the poor, forgiveness rather than revenge, and the ethic of loving thy neighbor²⁴. So convinced of the moral ground upon which he stood, he challenged those in authority, losing his life in the process. That he was human and did all this, in my mind, makes the historical Jesus’ life all the more memorable and worthy of following.

His teachings have reached down into our own faith tradition, effecting many women and men, who tried to embody the call of their conscious to create heaven here on this earth. Like our Universalist ancestors he understood G*d as a loving sustainer of life, and not a punitive task master. Like our Unitarian ancestors, he promoted salvation by character, naming that it is how we live our lives that really matters. And, in this day and age, though it may be the Spirit of Life and Love that sustains us in troubled times and calls us to our best selves, it is our conscious that asks us to awaken, to be self-aware, and to consciously choose to live lives that promote health and healing, justice and equity, in this world, in this life, now.
Amen.

***Closing Hymn #276** *O Young & Fearless Prophet*

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Rev. Lloyd

²² <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5-7&version=ESV> April 19, 2014

²³ “*The Unknown Jesus.*” A&E Documentary, 1999.

²⁴ “*The Unknown Jesus.*” A&E Documentary, 1999.