

Zechariah 9:9-12 and Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Some of you were here for the forum on Wednesday...for a packed church, it was an incredibly moving experience to hear the words of this man, Frederick Douglass... and to think about justice and freedom in these days...but it was not just an academic experience...Alice Parker lifted us all as she led spirituals of the time, songs of spirit...a packed church raised our voices singing together, "Deep river", "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me", "We Shall Overcome" and others. It was an affirmation for me of how the arts---deepen the message and touch our hearts.

Let us be in prayer: Spirit God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Zechariah had a message. His was one of the last prophetic writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and although it is all about the kingly entrance to Jerusalem, it is not clear which king he meant. Was it purely a pondering of some future ideal king?

James Butler writes, " Perhaps it was Darius I, the Persian king who authorized the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem who passed through Judah on his way to a revolt in Egypt...or perhaps it was referring to a later arrival of Alexander the Great who was remembered in legends as receiving a grand reception in Jerusalem... Whoever it was... we come to the same conclusion: it was a king who was different from the general *experience* of kings, both in Israel and among the empires of the world!"

This is a different kind of ruler that is envisioned and longed for!

And did your ears perk up when you heard how this messianic king, one who would save the people, was to enter Jerusalem...did it sound familiar? Hear it again, "Your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey....and he shall command peace to the nations..." Where have you heard that before? From this prophet of the Hebrew Scriptures....we now know where the words came from describing Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday!

Rachel Baard writes: "First, this ideal king is one who rules with righteousness and justice....this messianic king holds within him the hope of an oppressed people. Secondly, he rules with God's help and does not rely only on his own strength. He, or she, listens to a deeper wisdom, a larger vision. And thirdly, this kind of leader is gentle (humble) and not proud or boastful."

Think how profound this is! Zechariah said that a leader who saves all is not a person of war, violence or retribution but a person who brings peace to all the nations...who is humble...and who relies on a higher or deeper wisdom for strength. Amazing...

Now in Matthew: This is a little bit of a banter with Jesus sending his disciples out to do the work. Like us, he seems to be saying "What is going on with this generation?" He says they are like children who say, "We played the flute, but you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn!"

He seems to be pointing to all of us...children of the land whose song is never quite understood... Perhaps the song is perfectly clear to Jesus...this messianic prince of peace...and yet society as a whole, indeed an entire generation of people fail to respond... to THIS song that longs for peace and justice among all nations.

In the way that Jesus often turned things upside down, he said it is the young and the innocent, the infants!, who understand...while the truth is hidden from those who presume to be wise. What a way to open up our hearts and our imaginations! Who really understands, truth?

Let's get to the yoke part. Not eggs...but heavy burdens. Picture those heavy wooden yokes that drape over the shoulders of oxen...I've seen them at the ox pulls around here... One commentator said: "rest is not offered to the strongest and the most powerful...rest is offered to those who have been made weary by a world that fails to comprehend the burden of injustice."

I feel weary sometimes...don't you? Don't you feel sometimes that as much as we pray for and talk about and act with yearning for peace in our times and in our world...the greedy and the powerful seem to get a step ahead...

But this is where these words of Jesus give us hope... If we recognize that the burden is not on our shoulders alone...that we have the presence of God-with-us..., even as our hearts ache for family members or those who are oppressed in all manner of ways. God aches with us. We are not alone as we work *together* in humility and not arrogance, with compassionate, not condescension, being gentle and not boastful... And then, Jesus said, "these heavy burdens will be made light."

We all know burdens, perhaps we try to solve too much on our own. This is why I love being part of a congregation with whom we can cry and work together for the

good of others and for peace here and in the world...it helps lighten the load....and maybe we should sing a little more..."I want Jesus, to walk with me!"

I want you to consider these guests on our walls again for the peacemakers they were... Frederick Douglass himself, who seems to look me in the eye every time I come in the room, reminding me I must never hide behind my religion and ignore the needs of those in our world who suffer. Did you know that he spoke in Greenfield... where he was allowed to speak, but *not* permitted to stay in a hotel? He became the eloquent spokesperson for the abolitionist movement even before the Civil War. He used his voice to speak out for justice.

We have Sojourner Truth, who escaped slavery on the Hudson River in 1840's, became a Quaker and lived in Northampton where she became known for her "powerful speech and song!" Alice, teach us her songs!

Ida B. Wells, was born into a slave family but after the Civil War she became a powerful voice against the practice of lynching as she published 4 newspapers between Memphis and Chicago. It was her writing that made the stories of lynchings known.

And of course, Martin Luther King Jr., who from his church as pastor and preacher, became the voice for Civil Rights. Louise Minks, the artist of these portraits writes that he had an early connection to Connecticut when he came with friends from Morehouse College to work in the fields...but the experience of being able to enter stores, restaurants and movies without restriction made it hard for him to return to the south. But he continued to preach and organize non-violent movements for peace and justice.

Each of these figures...in their own ways, contributed to making our world more just.

And our denomination, the United Church of Christ, hears the longings for peace and justice at their biennial meetings. Just last week the following resolutions were passed. Now, remember that these resolutions are brought by individuals to their congregations who then gather with their conferences to see if there is support and then the issues are discussed and researched thoroughly before they even get to the Synod. But here are some issues they voted on last week.

They voted in favor of a resolution advocating for economic justice, including calling for churches to support legislation that raises the minimum wages to \$15 per hour.

They enthusiastically passed a resolution of witness, guided in large part by the voices of youth, urging the recognition of *gun violence as a public health emergency* deserving of federal funding for research.

The delegates also overwhelmingly declared itself an *Immigrant Welcoming Denomination* and called on all settings of the United Church of Christ to consider doing the same. Underscoring the love of neighbor, they voted 96 percent in favor of the Resolution of Witness, which was brought by the Minnesota, Wisconsin, Northern California Nevada, Massachusetts, and Central Pacific conferences.

The delegates also overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling on Israeli authorities to end widespread and systematic human rights abuses against Palestinian children in Israeli military detention. This resolution led by the UCC Palestine/Israel Network and brought forward by 16 individual UCC churches passed with a 79 percent majority.

There were other resolutions as well, including one on climate change and the environment.

We are not alone in our longing for peace and justice in this world....

May the yoke lighten as we continue to walk in faith towards this vision of peace.

Amen.