

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Second Sunday of Easter – April 3, 2016 – Communion

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Guest: Shigeko Sasamori

<http://www.hibakushastories.org/meet-the-hibakusha/meet-shigeko-sasamori/>

John 20:19-31

REFLECTION

“We are not saved by correct beliefs about the resurrection but by BEING the resurrection.”

- Rev. Robin Meyers, Mayflower UCC, Oklahoma City

Being the Resurrection

Every time this text comes up I feel the need to explain the line:

...the doors of the house where the disciples had met
were locked for fear of the Jews...

It is the source of much Christian anti-semitism and completely misinterpreted. John's gospel was written late in the first century at a time when Jesus followers (also Jews) were in deep conflict with orthodox Judaism which was under siege by the Romans who had destroyed and sacked the temple in Jerusalem. Messianic Jews were being banned from synagogues for the sake of preserving traditional Judaism. John's reference to "Jews" was to the orthodox Jewish hierarchy of his time – not Jews in general.

Okay. You may remember that last week we had a story from the Gospel of Luke about women who found an empty tomb where Jesus had been buried – and messengers from G-d reminding them of what this meant. The women went to tell the male disciples – who did not believe them – except Peter who had to see it for himself before believing.

This week – we have a story from the Gospel of John where the men get a taste of their own behavior. The post-resurrection Jesus visits them in a locked room – offers them a benediction, shows them his wounds and breathes onto them the Holy Spirit – the comforter and companion that will take his place as G-d's Presence with them from now on. Thomas isn't there. When he comes back he refuses to believe them – unless he can see and experience it for himself. Payback!!! Now they know what it's like to be disbelieved – even if only for a few moments.

The thrust of the story, of course, is that none of the new Jesus followers has seen Jesus or will probably ever see Jesus. So it's important for them to be encouraged to believe all of this stuff without first-hand experiences. The founders of the movement and church, the writers of the gospels, the progenitors of what became Christianity needed to be believed in order to spread the message. So:

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

But the thing is – if we go back to the beginning and look at the central message of Jesus as close as we can decipher it – beliefs are not the point. Actions are the point. Loving G-d and one another is a statement of action, not belief. Having compassion rather than following purity laws – acting upon that compassion – that was his M.O. So if we are going to find and communicate meaning around this story of Resurrection – it really doesn't matter what any of us believes. What matters is that we live the truth of it.

We read a good portion of a book together when I first got here – The Underground Church by Robin Meyers, a UCC minister. He is the minister of a flourishing UCC church in Oklahoma City, is a member of the Jesus Seminar and is a leading Progressive Christian. He makes this point repeatedly:

We are not saved by correct beliefs about the resurrection
but by BEING the resurrection.

So I'm going to ask you:

What are you doing in your life that communicates resurrection?
How CAN you or how DO YOU bring "new life" into the world?

We are honored this morning by the presence of someone who knows deeply about BEING the resurrection. Her name is written on the bottom of the cross we were given after WWII by Rev. Tanimoto and she was a guest of Alan Hunter and this congregation in 1955.

I now invite Shigeko Sasamori san to speak to us about her life as an atomic bomb survivor.

John 20:19-31

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.