

INTERFAITH THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION

UCC in SIMI VALLEY - Thanksgiving Eve - November 24, 2004

Anne G. Cohen

Reflections on Deuteronomy 26

There is NO WAY we got here by ourselves.

There is NO WAY that we have arrived at this time and place, to these - our common and individual circumstances – all on our own.

I look at this building and see the several hundred faithful people who began over 40 years ago – and began again 10 years ago – and left legacies of sweat and hope and resources and faith – making possible this new Gathering Place.

I look at you – the ones gathered in this place – and I see the faiths represented among us – many manifestations of Jewish and Christian beliefs. And I feel the palpable absence of our Muslim and Buddhist and Hindu sisters and brothers who are with us even in their absence. I see the intertwining of our various HISTORIES, the languages that God speaks to reach every one of us in our OWN language. I see among us the Holy One who has many Names.

I look at each one of us, our human-being-ness, and I am aware that every particle of our physical bodies has, at some moment in the last 10 million years – passed through the intestinal tract of an earthworm. I am aware that we are made up of the same mineral compounds as the stars and asteroids. We are, at once, worm castings and star dust. And we did not arrive here by ourselves.

I am aware that most of us did not walk here tonight – and remain cognizant of the inventors, the innovators, the assembly lines, the petroleum industry, the road cutters and pavers and maintainers, the bridge builders, the law makers who set speed limits for us to violate, the covenant with others in our community that we will drive safely so that we don't injure or kill one another, the ozone, the air quality management board, the environmentalists, the dealers, the customers, the trust we have that we are meeting the transportation and health requirements of one another. We got here – and we did not do it on our own.

Because an ancestor survived an ocean crossing or a mountain pass, we are here.
Because two people met by accident and married or went into business together, we are here.
Because of ancient remedies and modern medicine and the power of prayer and will, we are here.
Because of family and strangers, 12-step programs and one or two school teachers,
because of a loan or an inheritance, a gift or sheer luck,
because of opportunities and the resources to take advantage of same,
because of choices and chances, we are here.
And we, in NO WAY, got here by ourselves.

In ancient days, hospitality was a matter of life or death on the road. Strangers fed and sheltered you or you died. For many in the world, even here in Simi Valley, this is still true.

Years ago [Howard Thurman, African American Christian preacher] was walking along a road outside of Rangoon. He writes:

I noted at intervals along the way a roadside stone with a crock of water and, occasionally, some fruit. Water and fruit were put there by Buddhist priests to comfort and bless any passerby – one's spiritual salutation to another. The fact that I was a traveler from another part of the world, speaking a strange language and practicing a different faith, made no

difference. What mattered was the fact that I was walking along the road – what my mission was, who I was – all irrelevant. (Brussat p.341)

Hospitality is a necessary practice for the health of our own souls – as well as the health of our community. As Abraham once found out, you can find yourself entertaining angels – so stay alert!

In the mid-1700's members of my family moved from Westphalia, Prussia – to Liverpool, England. In the late-1800's they were around the table one rainy evening, lighting candles for Shabbat, and heard a knock at the door. A Mr. Morris sought food and shelter for the night and, because of Elijah, found a place already set for him at the table. Mr. Morris and the Cohens joined efforts in business and did well. When Mr. Morris died, he left his modest fortune to the only family he had, the Cohens of Liverpool, England. That gift brought my family to Philadelphia to open Globe Envelope factory. That gift supported my grandmother in comfort to the age of 101 – and is now being enjoyed by my father – may he find joy in the last penny. We did not get here on our own. And hospitality is proof that we understand this.

Hospitality is the foundation of our understanding of our reliance on one another, what Buddhists call Interbeing, what scientists call the Web of Creation. John Muir's words, "Pick out one thing and find it connected to everything else in the Universe" are the words of his personal creed – a declaration of a spiritual truth.

Our Holy Books, our Scriptures, are relevant and meaningful to us today because within these texts – there are stories about the people who got us here, the people who knew we were coming and prepared for us, the people who understood mutuality and hospitality and the dangers of lone rangers. In these texts are the people who knew before the scientists proved it, that we are worm castings and star dust, Children of an Awesome God. In these texts are the words of people who knew they didn't get there by themselves and told their stories so we would KNOW what they knew.

I believe that Deuteronomy 26 is not just a prescription for ritual sacrifice, although that would have been enough.

I believe it is not just an order for tithing our first fruits, although that would have been enough.

I believe Deuteronomy 26 is not just a recitation of the History of God's Liberation of a People, although, surely, that would have been enough.

I believe that this text is ALSO about the recognition that we, in NO WAY, got here by ourselves – and we are charged with the responsibility to grab the hands of those around us – so that we can all move forward together.

I believe that this text is ALSO about recognizing that we are privileged and blessed, and NOT entitled –

that we possess nothing that is not given by God –

that we are capable of gratitude and generosity – even if only in imitation of the God who made us.

I believe that this text encourages us to offer up that which is most precious to us – first of the harvest, first pay check, our sweat, our time – our PRECIOUS TIME – in gratitude. Worship on our Sabbath days is not necessarily about vegetables or slain goats any more. It is about setting aside our valuable time – in recognition that even TIME is a gift.

I believe that Deuteronomy 26 is about giving back to the Giver, to God – but not just by funding the clergy and working on the Building Committee – as blessed and honorable as that is.

In the text, the tithe offered to the priest at the Temple is combined with all other tithes.

With the abundance of what is given, a feast is held.

The tithers of all rank and ability, sit down together – the rich and the poor – and feast WITH the strangers/ resident aliens/ undocumented workers/ fugitive Arameans.

The tithers eat and drink WITH the orphans of war/ runaways/ castoffs/ street kids/ gang members. The tithers celebrate at the same table with the widows/ battered women/ single parents/ hookers and johns/ homeless families/ unbathed alcoholics/ the ones who are invisible or untouchable or utterly expendable.

We tithers don't just serve dinner to the homeless, we sit down and eat with them – because we were once homeless too – and still are, as long as they are.

We don't just fund the Samaritan Center, we ARE the Samaritan Center – we become staff – we find ways daily to be with those without whom WE WOULDN'T BE WHO WE ARE – OR WHERE WE ARE – Here – in this place.

Because, it is in the stranger, widow, orphan, that we meet and feast with God.

Because in all that is – from worm castings to star dust – there is a Divine Spark – a Presence without which ALL would be darkness and silence.

And that is – ENOUGH. Let us Thank God with every particle of our being.

A Celebration of Thanksgiving
Wednesday 7:30 P.M.

November 24, 2004

12 Kislev 5765

Prelude

Two Bourees

by Henry Purcell

Rebecca Dekker and Joan Thompson, duo pianos
United Church of Christ

Welcome

Nancy Pries, Moderator
United Church of Christ

God be in my thoughts, and in my heart. In my left hand and in my right hand. Atone me. At-one me with you and your love. Help me to pray for those I fear as well as those I love, knowing that you can take my most ungracious prayers and give them grace. Whenever we pray, we are tapping the power of creation, and that's a mighty power. There are a lot of battle lines to cross in order for us to pray with each other, and with the rest of the world, with those who do not agree with us, with those who worship God in ways we do not understand. But that is all right. We do not have to understand. We do have to try to turn to love, to know that the Lord who created all, also loves all that which was made.

(“Praying Inclusively” Glimpses of Grace, Madeleine L’Engle p.305-6)

Call to Worship

Hava Nashira Shir Halleluyah

Let us sing a song of Halleluyah

Cantor Michael Russ
Congregation B’nai Emet

Thanksgiving Proclamation

Steve Sojka
Simi Valley City Council Member

Hymn

We Gather Together

New Century Hymnal # 420 / 421

**We gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing;
he chastens and hastens his will to make known;
the wicked oppressing now cease from distressing;
sing praises to his Name; he forgets not his own.**

Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,

ordaining, maintaining his kingdom divine;
so from the beginning the fight we were winning:
thou, Lord, wast at our side: all glory be thine!

We all do extol thee, thou leader triumphant,
and pray that thou still our defender will be.
Let the congregation escape tribulation:
thy Name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!

Opening Collect (Unison)

Psalm 100

The Rev. Steven J. Dean
St. Francis of Assisi

**Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

(Translation: NRSV)

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 26

Carole Feinberg
Congregation B'nai Emet

Reader: The Word of the Lord
People: **Thanks be to God**

Music

Let All The World In Every Corner Sing

by Sally K. Albrecht
Rebecca Dekker, Pianist
United Church of Christ

Performed by the Interfaith Choir – the combined choirs of Congregation B'nai Emet, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church, Simi Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church, the United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ, under the direction of Billie Dierking, United Church of Christ.

Psalm 65 (Responsive)

Lee Haack AHC
St. Francis of Assisi

One: All Your people owe you praise, El Shaddai!
Many: **All flesh should pay their vows to You. For you answer our prayer
and forgive our sins, even when they overcome us.**
One: Blessed are those You draw near to Yourself.
Many: **They abide in Your presence, and are satisfied with your goodness.**
One: You deliver us with awesome deeds, O God of our salvation.
Many: **You inspire hope to the ends of the earth, to the farthest seas.**

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One: By Your strength You set the mountains in place.
They are the earth's mighty girdle!
Many: **You still the roaring waves of the sea, and calm the tumult of the peoples.**
One: Those who dwell in remote places revere Your signs -
Many: **The joyful comings of morning and evening,
the beauty of sunrise and sunset.**
One: You visit the earth with rain and nurture its soil.

Many: You fill the rivers with swift-flowing water.

One: In your generous providence You grant grain in abundance.

**Many: You settle and soften rich furrows with showers,
You water the ground and bless the land with new growth.**

One: You crown each year with Your bountiful goodness.

Many: Great plenty springs up in the wake of your footsteps!

One: The hills are clothed with green gladness.

Many: The meadows are filled with flocks.

One: The valleys are covered with grain.

Many: Everything sings and dances together with joy, celebrating Your bounty.

(Translation: Swallow's Nest Marchiene Vroon Rienstra, p. 104)

Quartet

The Peace of Jerusalem

by John Glenn Paton

An original composition based on the Jewish Book of Psalms # 122

Soprano, Billie Dierking * Alto, Joan Thompson

Tenor, John Paton * Bass, Bob Erickson

Reflection

Rev. Anne G. Cohen
United Church of Christ

Hymn

Now Thank We All Our God

New Century Hymnal # 419

**Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.**

**O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us!
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in his grace, and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills in this world and the next.**

Modim

Music by Irwin Cohen, Lyrics by Meridith Patera
Performed by the Interfaith Choir
Irwin Cohen, Pianist
Congregation B'Nai Emet

**Mo-dim, a-nach-nu lach.
Sheh-a-tah a-do-nai, e-lo-hey-nu
Tsoor, tsoor, cha-yay-nu
Ma-gayn, ma-gayn yish-ay-nu.**

(spoken solo)
*We give thanks to You,
For You are the Lord, our God,
The rock of our life
And our protecting shield.*

Litany of Thanksgiving

Psalm 107:1-9

Rev. Dr. Lewis Fry
United Methodist Church

Praised are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe,
for granting us life, for sustaining us,

and for causing us to reach this day.

**We give thanks to you, God, we give thanks to you,
as we call upon your name, as we recount your wondrous deeds.**

Praised are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe,
who has withheld nothing from your world
and has created beautiful creatures and beautiful trees for mortals to enjoy.

**We give thanks to you, God, we give thanks to you,
as we call upon your name, as we recount your wondrous deeds.**

Praised are you, Lord, God of all creation,
for you feed the whole world with your goodness,
with grace, with loving-kindness and tender mercy.

You give food to all creatures,
and your loving-kindness endures forever and ever.

**We give thanks to you, God, we give thanks to you,
as we call upon your name, as we recount your wondrous deeds.**

Praised are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe
who with wisdom fashioned the human body,
creating openings, arteries, glands and organs,
marvelous in structure, intricate in design.

Should but one of them, by being blocked or open, fail to function,
it would be impossible to exist.

Praised are you, Lord,
healer of all flesh who sustains our bodies in wondrous ways.

**We give thanks to you, God, we give thanks to you,
as we call upon your name, as we recount your wondrous deeds.**

Praised are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe,
who graciously bestows favor upon the undeserving,
even as you have bestowed favor upon us.

**We give thanks to you, God, we give thanks to you,
as we call upon your name, as we recount your wondrous deeds.**

(Translation: San Bernardino Clergy Association)

Music

Sicilienne

by J.S. Bach
Joan Thompson and Rebecca Dekker, duo pianos
United Church of Christ

Presentation of Offerings

Father Lawrence Seyer
St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church

Leader: Let us with gladness present the offerings of our life and labor to God.

(Please follow the guidance of the ushers as you bring your offerings forward during the offertory.)

Offertory

Brass Ensemble
Simi Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church

*Food Offerings will be donated to Care and Share.
Monetary offerings will be donated to the Samaritan Center*

Blessing of Offerings

Marcia Cooley, Parish President
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

One: Holy God, whose voice speaks to us in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world...

Many: Accept our gifts, O God.

One: Holy God, whose voice speaks to us through today's happenings in the **world...**

Many: Grab our attention so that we learn your Will.

One: Holy God, whose voice speaks to us through our sisters and brothers in the worlds...

Many: Show us your face in the faces of those who surround us.

One: Holy God whose abundance brings us together in a spirit of acceptance and love...

Many: Inspire us to share resources equally with all peoples of the world.

One: Holy God, we give into your hands our unfinished tasks, our unsolved **problems, our unfulfilled hopes...**

Many: Bless those which you want to prosper.

One: Holy God, we commit each other and all for who we have prayed into your great love and protection, knowing that you alone are our sure defender.

All: Amen.

(Compiled from a Native American prayer, a Prayer for All Faiths and a Prayer of the Church of South India, found in With All God's People, World Council of Churches, Switzerland)

Musical Offering

Many Gifts, One Spirit

by Mary Lynn Lightfoot
Rebecca Dekker, Pianist
Performed by the Interfaith Choir

Sending Prayer

All Worship Leaders

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.**

Hodu

by Debbie Friedman
Irwin Cohen, Pianist
Barbara Poehls, Violin
Congregation B'Nai Emet
Performed by the Interfaith Choir

Sending Hymn

How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies

New Century Hymnal # 594

**How beautiful for spacious skies, our amber waves of grain;
our purple mountains as they rise above the fruited plain.
America! America! God's gracious gifts abound,
and more and more we're grateful for life's bounty all around.**

**Indigenous and immigrant, our daughters and our sons;
O may we never rest content till all are truly one.
America! America! God grant that we may be
a sisterhood and brotherhood from sea to shining sea.**

-6-

**How beautiful, sincere lament, the wisdom born of tears,
the courage called for to repent the bloodshed through the years.
America! America! God grant that we may be
a nation blessed with none oppressed, true land of liberty.**

**How beautiful, two continents, and islands in the sea
that dream of peace, non-violence, all people living free.**

**America! America! God grant that we may be
a hemisphere where people here all live in harmony.**

(Adapted from the poem by Katharine Lee Bates
by Miriam Therese Winter)

Postlude

Gavotte in G Major

by J.S. Bach

Rebecca Dekker and Joan Thompson, duo pianos
United Church of Christ

**You are invited to join with your neighbors
for Thanksgiving Dinner tomorrow
at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church
(Stow and Cochran)
from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
The entire meal will be provided compliments of
Cub Scout Pack 3689**

*We welcome all who have gathered to worship and give thanks to God this evening. We extend
our thanks to the choirs and musicians of:*

Congregation B'nai Emet
Irwin Cohen, Music Director

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Len Loomis, Music Director

St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church
Donna Cummings, Music Director

Simi Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church
Chuck Jenson, Music Director

United Methodist Church
Rob Courtney, Music Director

and

United Church of Christ
Billie Dierking, Music Director

*for their musical offerings. You are invited to join us for fellowship and potluck refreshments in
the kitchen following our service of celebration!*

*The Interfaith Celebration of Thanksgiving is offered in thanksgiving to God for our shared heritage of faith by
the clergy and people of:*

Congregation B'nai Emet
4645 Industrial Street (off Tapo Street) * 581-3723
Rabbi Michele Paskow * Cantor Michael Russ

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

9 West Bonita Drive * 583-0556

The Rev. Richard Schieber

St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church

280 Royal Avenue * 526-5141

The Rev. Steven J. Dean * The Rev. George Luthringer

St. Peter Claver Roman Catholic Church

5649 Pittman (corner of Cochran and Stow) * 526-6499

The Rev. Mons. Gary Bauler * The Rev. Lawrence Seyer

Simi Valley Hospital

2975 Sycamore Drive * 955-6225

Chaplain Kathy Lewis

Simi Valley Seventh Day Adventist Church

636 Sinaloa Road * 526-0141

Pastor Chuck Jenson

United Methodist Church

2394 Erringer Road * 526-6231

Dr. Lewis Fry * The Rev. Malyong Yi

United Church of Christ

370 Royal Avenue * 526-6001

The Rev. Anne G. Cohen

We invite you to join us for worship in the future at our regular Sabbath celebrations. Please call the numbers listed above for more information about worship services and other programs.