Building for IUCC’s future!
Whew, what a busy month April was! Just in the last month, all of this was accomplished:

- The foundation was poured
- Steel columns went up
- Most of framing was completed
- Sprinklers were installed in the sanctuary
- The sanctuary was re-painted

This next month, we can expect:

- Installation of HVAC
- Installation of utility lines
- Installation of insulation, sprinklers and drywall

With everything looking good for completion in late July, we anticipate only three more months of construction. Thanks for your patience during the inconvenience of construction! Occupancy is scheduled for early August, meaning that staff will relocate, and we’ll be able to start using the new meeting rooms. Once the current Church Office is vacated, remodeling of it into a new classroom for our busy preschool will begin immediately so it is ready for fall enrollment.

Mark your calendars now for Sunday, September 9. On that day, we will dedicate the new building and thank this church community for its generosity and vision for IUCC’s future. You won’t want to miss this celebration!

OAC (Owner, Architect & Contractor) meetings continue to take place weekly with Michael Spindle, Jim Raver, Pastor Paul, Mark Allen and Anne Rosse representing IUCC. We give thanks and gratitude for their dedication and expertise.

Your generous and speedy payment of campaign pledges is so appreciated! Don’t forget that we are still actively raising money, so if you haven’t joined us in supporting this project, we invite you to do so today. Or, perhaps you have completed your pledge and find that you can give just a little more. Please contact capitalcampaign@iucc.org or the Church Office to make a new or amended pledge.

We’ll look to finish off our campaign fundraising by the end of June. Then, when the new building opens, we’ll have “wish list” opportunities in a variety of price ranges to add those extra furnishings that will make the new space even better. Even if you can’t afford much, there should be options so that everyone in our church family can be a part of making this new space happen. Watch us build for IUCC’s future!
Transitions offer new pathways and opportunities. They are also at times very difficult, because they cause us to mark the end of an era before we can move forward.

We have been blessed by many years of committed, loving, and loyal service to our church family by our Administrator, Michael Spindle. It is time for a new chapter for both David and Michael, as he announces his retirement plans. I knew this was coming for a long time, as Michael was very upfront about his plans, but it is still difficult to process for those of us who have had the privilege to work beside him over the years.

And, how many years? Michael was conscripted by Fred Plumer to fill in for his predecessor for a few weeks when the church was busy putting on a major “Progressive Christianity” event at a nearby hotel in Irvine. I remember—I attended the event. So, those few weeks turned into 18 years and counting.

Michael tends to all aspects of our physical plant, which is a large enough job as it is, and he takes great pride in it. He is currently representing us as part of the Building Task Force, and works with our architect and construction team. He calendars the many events that take place on campus while creating our weekly bulletins and church communications. He fields your calls, and lets us know who needs our attention. Michael sits in on board meetings, and keeps a watchful eye on our church community, while working with Heidi to provide staff support to our pre-school.

He also assists me every day, and his opinions are greatly valued by me, as well as by anyone who has benefitted from his wisdom.

So, this is not easy. But, for someone who has given so much love to his church over the many years, it is time to thank Michael and wish him well as he prepares to make the move with David to their house in Phoenix, where they have family nearby.

Mark your calendars for June 24—this is the Sunday when we will celebrate him within the worship service. The two services will be different on this day—Sarah will preach at First Service, and I will take Second Service. We will also have a time to send him off with our love and gratitude.

Michael's last day in the office will be June 30. In the meantime, we have these two months, and we are looking at job descriptions and new ways of thinking about how the Administrator's role might look as we move into our future and (finally!) our new building. Stay tuned…

Finally, thank you Michael for your incredible dedication, integrity, sense of humor, love, and friendship. You can be very proud of what you achieved in your time here, and in the high regard in which you are held by this community. You know how I feel.

See You in Church!

Pastor Paul
“TCHOTCHKE” - a decorative item with little or no practical value - a knickknack, doodad, whatnot - sometimes sentimental.

Do you have tchotchkes in your house - perhaps sitting on a shelf or on a desk? I have some of these decorative, not very practical, but certainly sentimental (and for me, meaningful) items on my desks. As I sat down to write this column, I looked at my tchotchkes and noticed how relevant they are for where our church and the IUCC leadership is right now with our building project.

So here are a few pictures and then some illustrations. First, a stone that sits on my desk -

So today I’ll drop stones into the river
And the current takes them out into forever
And the truth is most of us will never know
Where our best intentions go
And still I’ll drop another stone

In July of 2016 at the IUCC Leadership Retreat, Pastor Sarah Fiske-Phillips invited us to choose a stone from the altar set up in Plumer Hall. She reminded us that stones come in many shapes and sizes, as do our dreams. As the verse above illustrates, we drop those stones with best intentions not sure where they’ll go. That idea resonates with me as I think about the challenges of being an effective leader. Many times we’re not sure what will be the results of our actions, but we keep on trying new ideas and plans. One of those plans that was “dropped in the river” was a Long Range Plan adopted in 2005.

That Long Range plan emphasized the importance of having additional meeting and classroom space. So we moved forward in faith - we knew that if we were to be the church that God was calling us to be - one that offered more programs and activities to be a greater progressive Christian presence in our community - we would have to have the space to do that. But we also needed to imagine - to dream - what that space would look like. After many meetings, decisions, detours, roadblocks and with strong leadership provided by our moderators - Keith Boyum, Cindy O’Dell, Anne Rosse - and with overwhelming support from the congregation - we were ready to move forward with a building program.

We’ve been in this building process for several years. The Conditional Use permit approval, the Capital Campaign, the approvals by the congregations to fund the building, and now the actual construction (with delays along the way) have required us to have patience and perseverance. Several of the tchotchkes on my desk reflect this -

“Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass. It’s about learning to dance in the rain.” (a daily reminder from one of my sisters)

I am sure that our Building Committee Chair, Anne Rosse, can relate to this. While we really haven’t had any rain to speak of, we certainly have had delays which affected our building progress as much as any deluge would. Through it all, friends and family of IUCC have remained focused and positive.

We have followed this advice - Keep Calm

With an occasional Gulp!

As the framing continues and we can actually see what our new space looks like, I imagine what a difference we can make as we move forward and embrace the future. Join me for the Spring Congregational meeting on May 20, 2018 as we gather in faith and community to elect new leaders and receive the latest update on our building.

Renae Boyum
Adult Sunday School – On March 22, I began a series that looks at the years 250-50 BCE, which saw a radical development in 2nd Temple Judaism, much of which became incorporated into early Christianity and Islam. I'm sure we'll go through the end of May. It's based on information from Philip Jenkins’ latest book *Crucible of Faith* (he calls this time period “the Crucible Era”). Amy-Jill Levine commented on the dearth of information about Judaism and Jewish history in the decades before Jesus; she had compliments for this book and its author’s approach.

Bible Study on Tuesdays – Thanks to Ken Wyant’s gentle persistence, we’re about mid-way through the Gospel of Luke, and that will be followed by the book of Acts (or Luke, Volume 2). Join us at 4 p.m. on Tuesdays!

Comma Groups – We held the Wrap-Up luncheon last Sunday, and I want to express my thanks again to all who participated in Comma Groups this year, and especially our Leaders and Organizers: Renae Boyum, Lorraine Fox, Linda Haghi, Terry LePage, Laura Long, Jim Martin, Anne Rosse, and Glenda Wyant. We'll be signing up for the next round of Comma Groups in late summer. Plan to give Comma Groups a try, if you haven’t yet done so! Comma Groups are IUCC’s program for adults to explore and develop our faith, and enhance our connection to our church and other members. We’ve got some suggestions for next year’s study resource, but I’d be happy to hear your ideas!

Midweek Salon – Now that we've moved back into the sanctuary for worship, Midweek Salon will be returning soon. Stay tuned for dates and speakers!

Special Study Opportunities – Bil Aulenbach (our Progressive Christianity columnist) will be offering three different short-term study series this summer, from mid-June through mid-September. They’ll be available on Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings (pick the time that’s convenient for you).

He'll share information on the historical Jesus, on the relation of Jewish midrash to the discourses in the Gospel of John, and on ideas for a “new Reformation” in Christianity. He'll also be leading adult Sunday school during July! Talk to Bil or me to find out more and sign up.
A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Cleveland, Ohio, where our national UCC offices are located. I went as a part of the Member in Discernment (MID) network, which assists people who are in the process of ordination. The conference was sponsored by the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization team (MESA), which supports the Committees on Ministry that determine authorization of ministerial standing. MESA is integral in the ordination process, and provided us with opportunities to hear from the UCC national staff, learn about pensions (yay!), and network with other future clergy. Although I am already licensed to be a pastor at IUCC, the next step will be ordination, which is recognized by the entire denomination.

During my time in Cleveland I got to hear from General Minister & President Rev. John Dorhauer and Executive Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries, Rev. Traci Blackmon. They both spoke about the future of the Church and what it will look like for those of us at the beginning of our careers. They reminded us to transform the world where our feet are, and Traci Blackmon asked us, “Where is God calling you to show up in this world?” It was a profound reminder to me of the power of God’s call in my life to minister to our hurting world. I was extremely grateful for the encouragement the conference gave me to continue on this path. I am grateful to be living out my call at IUCC and thank you for being a part of this journey!

As we look toward the summer, we have lots of great opportunities for our young people: Camp, a service/educational trip to Tucson, AZ, Vacation Bible School, and so much more! We can’t wait to tell you all about it!

**Pastor Sarah**

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*Where is God calling you to show up in this world?

—Rev. Traci Blackmon*
Ministry for Young People Photos

Photos courtesy of Pastor Sarah Fiske-Phillips
Applause in Worship
by Joni Baker

Should we applaud after prelude, choir anthems, or offertory selections? This is a hotly contested topic to be sure, so there is no answer to the question that pleases everyone. Irvine United Congregational Church is a place where allowing people to be who they are, have opinions, and express them openly is part of the fabric that makes us so fabulous. In that spirit, I am exercising my right to share my opinion. I come to you as a choir member and frequent soloist in worship services, so I believe I have the proper street cred to adequately broach this subject.

One could argue that singing and other music in church is a way to praise God. Psalm 95:2 states, “Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” Psalm 147:7 reads, “Sing to the lord with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp.” Before anyone worries about budgetary constraints, I am neither suggesting that we purchase a harp, nor pay Brian Noel to sit in residence! However, I do believe that all music in church is a form of praise. Congregational singing, solos, choir anthems, or instrumental works may all be counted as praise.

Music in church is also a way to share and receive messages. The early church was commanded to teach through songs. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Colossians 3:16. I know that for me, the lyrics in music help to either reaffirm or teach me some new aspect regarding my faith. Music has a way of burning a text into the soul in a way that just hearing it spoken may not. At any moment in a service, someone could be experiencing a renewal of spirit and faith to help see them through the difficulties of life. I know that personally, music has helped me receive answers to prayers and problems that have plagued me. In this way, music in church becomes a means of communion with God, like prayer. I trust that music has had similar meaning for other worshipers.

I have heard the argument that applause is a way of expressing gratitude for the person(s) providing the music. The reason I sing offertory solos is to invite the spirit and to share a message. I always pray before I sing that I will be an instrument in God’s hands to touch the hearts of those present. I pray that each congregant hears and feels what they may need at that time. I pray to be a vessel to share the love of God and bring a message of hope. I am not singing to receive praise or thanks from the congregation.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America addresses this issue like this: “Singers of all ages, instrumentalists and all musical leaders, must be reminded continually that their role in worship is to proclaim and praise God, not to entertain God’s people in worship… Worshipers, too, are to be reminded that they gather to worship, not to be entertained. Yet worshipers will often experience the powerful and sincere human desire to thank musicians for the service they provide to the church. After a particularly fine offering of music, worshipers may give thanks to God in silent prayer and personally thank the musician(s).”*

Applause is problematic for a couple reasons. It can disrupt spirit-filled, tender moments for fellow worshippers. As described above, musical offerings are often special moments for people to communicate with God. We generally don’t applaud after a spoken prayer, so why do we do it after a sung or played prayer? Applause can also lead to confusion. If the choir is applauded one week and not the next, it can lead to questioning the quality of what was shared. There is often that awkward moment when someone applauds after a musical offering, and others feel compelled to join in. Applause can also become perfunctory as with other rituals.

I doubt that this is the end of the debate, however I hope it gives folks something to ponder. Feel free to hold your applause whenever I am singing. Happy worshipping!

SAVE THE DATE
IUCC Chancel Choir Spring Concert
Sunday June 10th at 7:00 p.m.

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March Without Borders
Photos & Article by Felicity Figueroa

March Without Borders conducted a march in solidarity with the Central American Refugee Caravan who came up from Mexico, with the goal of meeting the Caravan when they arrived at the border.

It is an all-volunteer group of young people, faith leaders, organizers, activists, immigrants, and others who embarked on the 144-mile trek. They hoped that spiritual centers could provide some type of abode for rest and rejuvenation along the way, at whatever capacity that might be.

IUCC had some of the members of the March Without Borders stay at our church on April 24. They were walking from Los Angeles to Tijuana (144 miles) to meet up with the Caravana Viacrucis, a group of refugees from Central America who were fleeing gang violence in their home countries in the hopes of finding asylum in the U.S. Here’s an article that talks more about the Caravana from Central America: https://mobile.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/americas/migrant-caravan-mexico.html

Here’s the Facebook event page for the March: https://www.facebook.com/events/2094771014140111/

Glenna, Dean, Pastor Paul and I were there to greet the marchers; some members of our Amnesty International group that meets in Plumer Hall were also present. These are some photos taken that evening.
Okay, I have a new name for the EPA. In my mind, the EPA is no longer the Environmental Protection Agency. To the contrary, it is now the Eliminating Protection Agency. You ask why?

*Have you been reading and hearing about how under the EPA’s new administrator, large numbers of environmental protections have been removed? It is rapidly rolling back critical environmental protections that will take years to restore.

*Protections for public lands are being erased: Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments have already been drastically shrunk, and more are on the chopping block.

*The current administration is proposing a massive expansion of offshore oil drilling, potentially opening 90% of our country’s outer continental shelf to oil exploration.

*In addition, the current administration has proposed slashing the EPA by nearly a quarter next year.

All of the above speak loud and clear of the attempt to eliminate regulations that protect the environment! Why? In the name of commerce? Naomi Klein suggests that our culture believes, unfortunately, that greed is good, that the market rules, that money is what matters in life, that anything public or commonly held is sinister and not worth protecting. Sad! That isn’t my creed. I doubt it is yours.

Today, I spoke with a local scientist who said that the greatest problem facing us, other than entering into war, is the degradation of the planet. His concern is that we appear to have no sense of urgency, no understanding of human contribution to the problem, especially the negative effects of the use of fossil fuels.


You and I can be involved in environmental protection. We are people of faith who care about the well-being of others. Those who have contributed the least to climate change will be negatively affected the most. John Muir’s words of long ago resonate today: Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.

EARTH DAY is every day!

Vivian Elaine Johnson
(GREENfaith team: Judy Curry, Tony Dover, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Carol Getz, Martha Hansen, Bonnie Shaffstall, Eileen Vincent, Anita Schwab, and Vivian Johnson)
**IUCC’s 2018 Japan Mission Trip**

by JoAnne Mansell

“Travel to other countries makes me feel like a citizen of the world.” “I like experiencing other cultures and seeing sights that I’ve only read about in books and magazines.” “I like the excitement of going on a trip to a foreign land and the equal excitement of returning home again to better appreciate the USA.”

The upcoming missionary trip to Japan is especially important to IUCC’s Sharon Lynn, who will be joining Randy Romine, Ken Matsuyama and others from our church as they leave Los Angeles on May 10.

“I’ve never been to Japan, but I admire the work of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) and I want to help them in any way possible,” says Sharon. “I look forward to working with people from various countries.”

Along with contributing labor to the ARI, our church group will explore Tokyo, Nikko, Hakone, Yokohama, and Kamakura.

The estimated cost of the trip is $2400, which includes airline flights, transportation while in Japan, and accommodations. Contact Ken Matsuyama at 949-378-9032 or kmatsuyama@hotmail.com for further information.

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**News & Events**

**Women’s Fellowship**

Women’s Fellowship will **NOT** meet on May 2nd in order for everyone to pack for our annual retreat to Pilgrim Pines. We will reconvene on June 6th for our regular salad bar get together to make plans for the rest of summer.

**Isaiah House**

**Wednesday, May 9, 4:00 p.m.**

Volunteers serving a meal at Isaiah House meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month to provide a meal for the residents. Call (949) 436-1946 for more info.

**The Seeker’s Women’s Group**

**Tuesday, May 15, 9:30 a.m.**

This dynamic group of IUCC women meets on the third Tuesday of each month to share coffee, discuss relevant religious and theological topics, and morning treats. Contact Reef at reefahanny@comline.com for more information.

**Congregational Meeting**

**Sunday, May 20, 12:15 p.m.**

We will present a Building Progress report and ask members to ratify our 2018-19 Slate of Leadership Candidates. All IUCC members are encouraged to attend!

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**Want a Cookie? Of course you do!**

We love to gather round the snack table after church and visit with friends. The cookies, fruit, cheese, crackers, and other snacks are the perfect complement to our warm and vibrant congregation, and they help make all of us feel warm and welcome. But wait - they do not appear by magic! The tasty treats are provided by smiling and generous volunteers like you. If we don't have sign-ups, we don't have snacks - it's as simple as that. Don't let it happen here! Won't you add your name to the calendar? Sign up sheets are on the patio on Sunday mornings. If each of us committed to one Sunday each year, our calendar - and our tummies - would be full.

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On April 24th, four Scouts from Troop 602 opened the Irvine City Council meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance at Irvine City Hall. The Scouts were accompanied by the City of Irvine Police Color Guard during the pledge. The Scouts that participated in the opening of the Irvine City Council meeting were Felix T., Keith B, Colin Y., and Harry C.

During their time at City Hall, the Scouts got to meet members of the Irvine Police Department including Police Chief Mike Hamel. Irvine Councilmember Melissa Fox also met with the Scouts before the council meeting. Ms. Fox's son, Max, serves as an Assistant Scoutmaster with Troop 602 when he is home from his college studies at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks where he is currently majoring in Emergency Management.

It's never too late to join Troop 602 and experience the fun adventures of Scouting. You can sign your child up for Scouting at anytime during the year. If your child is 11-17 years old, they are eligible to join Troop 602. We will soon have information on how females ages 11-17 can join the Boy Scouts and have the opportunity to earn the rank of Eagle Scout like their male counterparts.
In our series on helping our children develop habits of “civility” we’ve been discussing how using “assertive” responses when interactions become less than civil can help restore more civil behavior between people, either one on one or in a group. Last month we outlined some examples of specific ways of responding “civilly” in unpleasant interactions and we’ll continue with some more specific examples of civil assertiveness.

It is important to convey to children/teens that assertive behavior has nothing to do with “placating” others by denying our honest feelings or positions. Many people skirt around where they actually stand on an issue or try to deny their honest emotions when interactions get challenging and uncomfortable. This practice only leads to a buildup of residual anger and resentment, which will make future encounters more likely to become difficult. Ask yourself, and then have a talk with your children about, why talking about feelings is hard for some people, especially in situations that are confrontational. Usually it’s because we’ve had unpleasant experiences when we had and shared strong emotions, and now we become hesitant to make ourselves vulnerable by sharing our feelings honestly again.

When other people have a strong negative reaction to hearing how we truly feel about something, it is not uncommon for them to “blame” this reaction on the person who shared the feeling. We can help children understand that this is a “defensive” response from someone, which we’ve discussed in this column before, and not the “fault” of the person who prompts the defensiveness. Becoming dishonest is an unhealthy way of abandoning assertiveness in favor of passivity to accommodate another’s difficulty with hearing something that is true. Learning to treat others civilly does not require this abandonment of being honest in our interactions. Rather, it asks us to be honest and true to ourselves in ways that are considerate of others, but not catering to others. Civility asks us to be kind, but not phony. Failing to stand up for how you really think or feel is ineffective in that your dishonesty is often transparent, which gives an advantage to others in taking advantage of your perceived “weakness” in being unable to hold to your own truth. It also causes you to disrespect yourself when you allow others to “walk over you” by causing you to retreat from expressing yourself truthfully. While the goal of such passive behavior is often to please others and avoid conflict, it is, in fact, likely to create more and more occasions when you are confronted with the need to decide between being “true to yourself” or deferring to others. Rude people who use bullying behavior tend to take on weakness.

Deference to others, while seeming to promote peace, actually promotes anxiety and a loss of self-respect. Passivity in the short run feels “safe” and avoids being challenged by others. In the long run, however, it can lead to a habit of being passive in tense, conflict-laden situations which then leads to: resentment over feeling like you have to “give in” to get along; anxiety about your ability to accept and survive a personal challenge and a lack of self-confidence; a tendency to have problems with honesty in interpersonal relationships; and a tendency to avoid taking “risks” which can promote personal growth. In other words, trading in the use of assertiveness which may cause discomfort in an interaction, for passivity, which may cause temporary peace, can become a short-term convenience for a long-term surrender of personal power.

Since rude, confrontational people take advantage of fear and weakness, we also want to avoid the appearance of passivity in our body language signals. When others are directing impolite and aggressive behavior toward us, we want to be sure we are not cowering, slumping, shifting, looking down, or becoming rigid. Hand fluttering, twisting, shrugging, bobbing our head up and down, chewing our lip, averting eye contact, blushing, lowering our voice to a whisper or higher to a squeal, laughing nervously, making statements that sound like questions all give clues to others that we are feeling insecure and unsure of how to maintain our composure. Help your children to become aware of these tendencies if you notice them, and explain how they embolden others who are trying to take advantage of them.

Note: I’ll be taking the month of June “off” from my writing duties for another operation on my leg and a stint in Rehab. I’ll be back to continue our discussion in July.
Who Saw the Resurrected Jesus?

The answer to that question should start with, “Who do you believe?” The earliest writing we have about Jesus probably comes from Paul’s letters, especially I Corinthians 15:3-8 written some twenty years after Jesus was crucified. Paul gives a list: Cephas (Peter) is first. Then the 12 which would include Judas, supposedly dead, unless you read the Gospel of Judas which says the betrayal never happened. Paul then talks about “500 men and woman” (big number) buts forgets to tell where, when and how. He talks about a “James” but neglects to say if it’s the brother of Jesus or the other James, brother of John, sons of Zebedee. Then Paul goes into his story about being an apostle and tells about Jesus appearing to him on the Road to Damascus. When Paul goes into “boast mode,” he loses me and my trust level goes down to zero. But the interesting aspect is that even in Paul’s time (33-63 CE) there were stories about Jesus and Resurrection, whether they are true or not.

The authentic Gospel of Mark, written about 70 CE, has no resurrection, no appearance, and no ascension story. However, at some time, maybe a hundred years later, redactors added 16:9-20 and threw in all the above ingredients which to me are total fabrication. For authenticity, my go-to Gospel is always Mark.

Let’s jump to the Gospel of John, which was never written to be an accurate history about Jesus. It’s “religious history” consisting of made-up stories in which John hides the “truth” inside the story. (See my course this summer: “Learning the Art of Midrash (interpretation) Using the Gospel of John.”) John’s tales of Mary of Magdala not recognizing the resurrected Jesus and “Doubting Thomas” are stories about something else.

The Gospel of Peter (about 150 CE), retells the crucifixion story but goes no further than saying the tomb was empty. Matthew (85-95 CE) and Luke (90-105 CE) are the only gospels to tell resurrection and after-life stories. Mary of Magdala is in both. Jesus’ mother is in neither. Matthew has a very short story with the eleven disciples going to Galilee, Jesus appearing, and ends with Jesus giving them his marching orders: “Go and baptize…” (28:19)

Luke relates the story of the two men (unidentified) on the road to Emmaus where Jesus eats breakfast with them (like Holy Communion) and then ascends.

Bottom line for me: none of the stories are true. But all the stories have great truths in them because Jesus and his message was/is so powerful that their lives were completely transformed… “resurrected.” Two thousand years later I still feel that power as my life continues to transform.

PeaceLoveJoyHope Bil

Here are my Progressive Christian summer offerings:
June: The Historical Jesus
July: Learning the Art of Midrash (interpretation) Using the Gospel of John
Late August/early September: Charting the 21st Century Reformation.

There are flyers/registration forms on the Sunday sign-up table.

The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity:

By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...
1. Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: * Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, * Believers and agnostics, * Women and men, * Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, * Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.
Musical storytelling is as old and diverse as human culture. Several national film industries have developed treasure troves of movie musicals. Chief among them is the United States, of course, but there's also India, China, France, Spain, Mexico and Brazil. Here's twelve films from twelve nations. If you're interested in the films that didn't make the cut, or if you've seen something I haven't, please, chat me up at Coffee hour.


2) China: *Farewell My Concubine* (1993-Chen Kaige) – From China, there's Chen Kaige's haunting bi-sexual love story set amidst the world of Chinese Opera. Although not technically a musical, there's enough Chinese Opera here to satisfy the curious.

3) India: *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001-Ashutosh Gowariker) - The history of the Bollywood musical is too rich to reduce to one film. Since I must, however, I choose Ashutosh Gowariker's historical fable about farmers, an English agricultural tax and cricket - a favorite of mine. It features Aamir Khan (the magnificent) and the music of A.R. Rahman.

4) Iran: *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009-Bahman Ghobadi) - A story about two Iranian singer/songwriters organizing their first tour to the West. One scene involves a young man who is nearly whipped to death because of his love for American film.

5) Lebanon: *Where Do We Go Now?* (2011-Nadine Labaki) - In a peaceful little town that's equally Christian and Muslim, a television arrives. With it comes sectarian violence for the first time. The women of the town, both Christian and Muslim, band together to stop the fighting. What they do is both hilarious and moving in equal measure.

6) Senegal: *Karmen Geï* (2001-Joseph Gaï Ramaka) - Oh, this one's hot! Our favorite Gypsy flower girl lays waste to Senegalese colonial authority. Rhythm is the music here: drums, hands clapping, spoons on prison bars, all accompanied by a first-rate jazz trio. And you can see it on YouTube, free of charge. With subtitles, no less. Warning! There's lots of nude bodies, corporal proximity and dirty talk, so put the kids to bed first.

7) Russia (USSR): *Circus* (1936-Grigori Alexandrov) – Stalin's USSR produced some of the finest propaganda (read “fake news”) ever made; many of these pieces were musicals. My favorite example is *Circus* by Grigori Alexandrov, the man who gave us *Ten Days that Shook the World*. The circus acts rival anything you'll see at Cirque du Soleil.

8) Germany: *Die 3 Groschen-Oper* (1931-Georg Wilhelm Pabst) - I debated. There was *Viktor Viktoria*, the original gender-bender. But, in the end, I chose the Threepenny Opera. Not only is it a wonderful film, but it captures something of the tumultuous moment that gave it birth. It also features a young Lotte Lenya as the Pirate Jenny.


10) Spain: *El Amor Brujo* (1986-Carlos Saura) - One of three flamenco films made by Carlos Saura and Antonio Gades. Most professional critics prefer *Bodes de Sangre*, but I like *El Amor Brujo*. Taken from Manuel da Falla's ballet of the same name, it features a spring ritual scene that raises the cockles. Sound familiar?

11) Mexico: *El Gran Casino* (1947-Luis Buñuel) – This is one of the films Buñuel made in Mexico while trying to escape Franco's notice. It brilliantly weaves Mariachi and Mexican folk songs around its rather slender story of local business and organized crime.

12) Brazil *Orfeu Negro* (1959-Marcel Camus) – This Brazilian Academy Award winner retells the Orpheus and Euridice myth in the wispy sound of Bossa Nova. It features songs by Vinicius de Moraes, Luiz Bonfá & Antonio Carlos Jobim: many of these songs have since become standards.