

Easter 2008

Dear Family and Friends of First Congregational UCC:

Late Thursday night, Jesus stood condemned by the religious council. Israel's "puppet" King Herod agreed. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor representing Caesar and the Empire, set his seal to the condemnation – even though he could find no fault in Jesus.

You know the story. The charges against Jesus were religious blasphemy – claiming to be one with God – and treason – claiming an unlawful kingship within the empire. Over his head was posted that charge "King of the Jews." In his trial, Jesus didn't deny his kingship, but stated "My Kingdom is not of this world." While his realm was not *of* this world, I hope we will never forget that he was proclaiming God's Kingdom *in* this world, God's realm *on* this earth. Jesus preached God's love for all people, God's inclusion of all people, God's call for fairness & justice & equality for all people here & now – on this earth – "Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven."

Good Friday was the condemnation of Jesus and his message. It was the Roman Empire & legalistic religiosity's response to Jesus and his love.

Easter is God's response to Empire, Legalism & Religiosity. God condemned death by giving life.

Easter is the vindication of Jesus & a message of life & love & equality. Easter is God's claim that Jesus is right about what is important: "Love God with your heart, soul, mind, strength. Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Who is my neighbor?

- Empire said "the neighbor to love is the powerful & the rich."
- Legalism said "the neighbor was the person who obeyed even unjust laws perfectly."
- Religiosity said "the neighbor to love is the person who observes outward forms of religion & spouts their beliefs the way we do. Ours is the only True Way."

Easter says that love of God, neighbor and self is the way to the life God wants for the world. Easter shows Empire, Legalism & Religiosity to be the shams they are.



THE DAY OF  
RESURRECTION

Jesus says that his Easter victory of life over death is your victory, too. All the fears that you have ever had about dying have been addressed by God. Isaiah's vision that God would destroy the 'pall of death' that overshadows all the nations has been fulfilled. At your death, this chapter of your life will end. Your essence & energy will be transformed. In your new life, you will know God as God knows you!

Join us for the Easter service at 10:30 a.m. Invite family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and get the word out that the love of Jesus trumps the death card & that God's kingdom is something we welcome & work toward here & now, not something we have to wait to die to behold!

May God bless us all in this miraculous season of Love & New Life!

Christ is Risen, Indeed!

Pastor Steve Wayles