

Zion's UCC of Taborton

April 8, 2018

Rev. Pat Raup

BE THE CHURCH: Honor The Past, Live In The Present, Plan For The Future

Acts 4: 32-35; Psalm 133; Luke 3: 10-11

We have come through hard times as a community of faith. In Lent we took a hard look at ourselves – our shortcomings, our wrongdoings, and our need to reach to others in reconciliation. We have, hopefully, learned from that.

We have come through Holy Week as a community of faith. We gave ourselves over in worship to the events of Jesus' life in the days leading up to his arrest, passion, crucifixion and resurrection. We feasted with friends, we entered into Jesus' betrayal and suffering, we witnessed his death and we rejoiced in his rising from death as we know it.

We have been rejuvenated, replenished and are, again hopefully, ready for the work of figuring out what kind of church we want to be in the 21st century. Konrad and I have a plan for this. This big banner is a big hint. It lists 9 issues that the United Church of Christ believes that all its churches need to grapple with and find ways to incorporate in their overall ministry.

As I said, the banner lists 9 issues, but Konrad and I have added one more: Be Peacemakers. It's not up there on the banner yet but we will figure out a way to do that.

So, from now through June 17 we will be taking one of those issues per Sunday to discuss with you. [We will take time out for Children's Day on May 13]. We will offer you some Biblical foundations for the importance of these issues and we may make some suggestions on how they can be incorporated more intentionally into the life of Zion's UCC. Your task will be to listen, to think, to pray and, again hopefully, come up with suggestions of your own as to how we can become better at following Jesus. Please talk to us during these weeks!

Once this series on Be The Church has concluded we'll take the summer "off" in the sense of not having a specific agenda for those Sundays. We will encourage you to listen deeply to the stories of Jesus' ministry while enjoying all that the great gift of creation has to offer us here on the mountain. Not to mention getting ready for the Summer Festival!

Then, in the fall we will prepare ourselves for some in-depth conversations about these issues, and any others that are important to you. We will figure out when and where to hold these conversations during the course of the summer. We encourage you to talk seriously with each other and with us during this down-time as a prelude to developing a direction for our future.

Which brings me to the subtitle for this message: Honor The Past, Live In The Present, and Plan For The Future. For the next year, at least, you will hear these words over and over again from both Konrad and myself. Let me explain what we mean by each phrase: 1) Honor The Past. Zion's is a place rich in traditions. We just experienced our first Sunrise Easter Service with you and it was wonder-filled and deeply meaningful. It's a keeper. And we just had the privilege of walking with the Hoffman Family as they mourned and buried Evelyn "Evie" Hoffman. We learned both what your traditions are around death and funerals, as well as why you hold to those traditions. We will honor them and be responsive to the wishes of each family that requests a funeral or graveside service.

BUT, and this is a big but – we have noticed that you have a tendency to hold onto a lot of the STUFF, the things that have been used in the past, whether or not these things are useful and meaningful in the present. Part of that is a healthy tradition of "waste not, want not" that you have inherited, but remember, you can only carry so much with you. We did some cleaning out together in Lent, but there is more to be looked at, more to make decisions about. Let's make sure we keep talking to each other honestly while we do this.

2) Live In The Present. It is OK to fondly remember times and people gone by, but if we expend our energy on that we won't have any energy left over to enjoy the good things of today. Enjoying the good things, and coping with the more difficult things of life as it is today, will actually free up energy. Energy that will be needed not only to tend to the immediate tasks and pleasures of our communal life but to plan for the future.

Planning for the Future is number 3. This is where we might get a little apprehensive, a little leery, a little fearful. We all remember what happened the last time we tried to do this. It did not go well. That doesn't mean it will be filled with conflict and anger and deep disagreement this time around. By following the process I outlined above and learning some conflict resolution skills along the way, both Konrad and I believe we can move through this planning in an effective way that will bring us closer together, more unified in what we understand Zion's UCC to be about in the coming years.

Today we chose to talk about one of the many things you already do well here at Zion's. We have witnessed and been the recipients of your generosity in your sharing of your earthly and spiritual resources. You have a long tradition of doing this. It is one of the things you are known for in the larger community here in the Rensselaer hills. If someone is in need, all that seems to need to happen is for this community to become aware of that need and action is taken to meet that need.

The downside of being a faith community on the edge of the wilderness is that we can become isolated, turned inward, and concerned more about taking care of just each other than thinking about and reaching out to those in need throughout the world. I know you contribute to the UCC's OCWM, Church World Services Blanket Program, and many Christmas-time giving programs, but we probably need to better inform ourselves about the big issues facing our planet – drought and famine in many areas of Africa, the effects of climate change, gun violence across our country, homelessness everywhere, addiction issues, services for the elderly and the disabled. And that's just to name a few. Sounds overwhelming, doesn't it? Admittedly, no one person and no one faith community can do it all, all the

time. But we can learn, reflect, pray and then choose some issues to make a part of our MISSION to the wider world.

If all this sounds like a lot, that's because it is. But we are not asking you to make all your choices today. We will take months, probably a year to work through all this together. We will most likely discover other issues that need to be tended to as we go along and we may need to pause and to take care of them now and again.

As long as we do this together and remember the golden rule. do unto others as you would have others do unto you, we will be OK. We will come out of all this with a clearer understanding of who we are as a faith community and what we wish to become as a faith community. I hope we will also have some fun and eat well along the way.

AMEN