

Visit to the Congregational Church UCC Scottsdale, AZ

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In April Dick and I went to Scottsdale with friends to watch the A's and Giants play some baseball games. When we realized that one of the churches mentioned in Diana Butler Bass's book, **Christianity for the Rest of Us** was there, we decided to stay an extra day and went to both services.

I looked up the website of Scottsdale Congregational Church which advised us to arrive twenty minutes early for the traditional service so we could enjoy the music of the professional pianist. At the beginning of the service the pianist introduced the music he had been playing by Janacek.

The church was smaller than ours and gave the appearance of being round or octagonal. It was well lighted and had two contemporary stained glass windows. It felt more intimate. A screen at front displayed pictures of the members working at the work day the previous day. It also displayed pictures of the grandchildren of the interim minister's grandchildren. He had visited them the previous week.

At the beginning of the service, the interim minister, Bob McFarlane, introduced a young man and an older man who were bicycling across the United States. They started in Maine and planned to go to the Pacific Coast.

The service was rather traditional. The theme was Peace – The Sevenfold Path to Peace:

1. Is Peace Possible
2. Desire Peace
3. Peacemaking
4. Peace in Shalom
5. The Gift of Peace
6. ?
7. ?

Part of the sermon was a video cartoon: One Tin Soldier which was about the futility of fighting. There was also a video of a Simpson episode about prejudice. People in the northern U.S. were prejudiced against the people with Norwegian accents. Both sides contributed to building a wall and during the construction realized how much they were alike. Fortunately, they remembered to build a door in the wall and the Norwegians were invited to the other side. Sounds corny but was rather meaningful.

Also, during the “sermon” a 13 year old junior high girl, Emily, was introduced. She and her youth group had been to the southern border of Arizona to help put up water stations for the illegal emigrants who were walking in from Mexico. She was very articulate and found the experience to be very important in her life.

No baskets were passed for the offering. There was a basket by the back door for people to make their offerings as they left.

Coffee hour was between the two services. We were warmly greeted by many. One woman, in particular, took us under her wing. We found that we were both members of P.E.O. which is an international organization that raises scholarships for college women. She also gave me a recipe.

The 11:00 service was called "The Studio". Apparently, it is different every week. A committee from the congregation meets from 12:00 to 3:00 every Wednesday to plan the service. It can be poetry, music, etc. On the Sunday we were there, a pianist and a guitar player provided the music (jazz). The words appeared on the screen. In the past, there had been a band but the budget could pay for only the two musicians this year. We thought they were very good.

The congregation was welcomed and introduced to the bicyclist (just one this time). The screen again showed the previous day's work party and also a birthday party for the bicyclist.

The Sevenfold Path to Peace was again the subject for the service. Instead of a sermon, there were three dialogues. The first was an interview with a member of the worship committee. The pastor shared his anger at the Israelis about their plan to build more housing in the Palistinian area but discussed his need to let go of the anger. The interviewee was of a member who had made one sky diving jump. They discussed his fear and how he had to let go of the fear. The second interview was of a woman who had just finished writing her thesis for a Master's Degree. The subject was about prejudice. She had used the Simpson TV clip as the basis for her writing. The third interview was of the junior high girl who had gone to the border. After each interview, the participants walked through a cloth wall to pick up a large gold package that was the gift of Peace. Each time they touched the gift a recording of Alleluia was played. It all sounds a bit corny again, but there was a spirit of having such a good time and the lessons were very clear.

Communion was at the end of the service.

As Dick and I left we commented on how glad we were that we had attended both services.