

PACIFIC CURRENTS

'Make the simplest kind of covenant and share bread with me'

By Mary Susan Gast

By the time I got around to preaching, the word for the day had already been spoken. It was Sunday morning at Annual Meeting. "God Is Still Speaking," we proclaimed, and then the singing began, "Jesus Loves Me." We sang it in many languages. It was exciting to hear the whole crowd singing and to notice that when we came, say, to the verse in Japanese, the volume surged from a pocket of people about halfway up the aisle on the left side of Merrill Hall. The Samoan verse was louder at the front on the right side. We'd all heard it before, of course. And like the multitudes gathered at Pentecost, we each hear it in our own language.

The language thing. The miracle of Pentecost was not that the apostles spoke in tongues, but

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that the crowds heard them—each in their own language.

Words Words Words Words— that's how Dorothy Streutker had begun her ballad at the Annual Meeting Talent Show the night before, blasting the judicial stuffiness of argumentation regarding the authority of the Mayor of San Francisco to set the right of equal protection



under the law over the state of California's law defining marriage as taking place between a man and a woman. With the brazen exasperation of a Broadway show tune, she demanded, "Don't talk of laws—show me!"

Jesus loves me. Don't talk about laws and restrictions and whether you take literally my "literal" interpretation of certain select passages of scripture, particularly from the book of Leviticus. Never mind that you refuse the literal application of explicit Deuteronomic law that would condemn any of us for wearing the evil fabric blends of cotton and linen, cited right there in chapter 22, verse 11, just show me.

"Gather to Me My faithful ones, who have made a covenant with me by sharing bread!" the Almighty bids us in Psalm 50. You

don't have to follow a bunch of arcane rules and restrictions. Make the simplest kind of covenant, share bread with me, says the Author of the Universe.

Don't talk of laws. Show me. Make a covenant with Me. Share the bread. Jesus loves me. Share the bread with one another and the covenant expands. Jesus loves us. None of us will ever be the same. The ones who were "they" yesterday are "us" today, and "we" are forever changed. Beyond words.

"God is Still Speaking" and "Jesus Loves Me" segue delightfully into the theme for next year's Annual Meeting: hospitality. Linda Jaramillo, PSR student/UCC sage, wrote about hospitality in her final exam for the UCC Faith & Polity course. Citing the thoughts of Tony Robinson and John McFadden, she described the

differences between hospitality and friendliness. Friendliness comes easily toward others like ourselves. Hospitality, though, does not assume that we are all alike; hospitality more than hints at the possibility that we may be different from those we welcome, and that those differences are a source of joy and wonder, to be cherished. "Hospitality," Joan Chittester has declared, "is love on the loose." Hospitality is at the heart of the scriptures, the wacko etiquette prescribed by the Holy Spirit in Miss Manners' guise, for every messianic feast, every "comma as you are" party. Hospitality shapes and re-forms all who dive into it. None of us will ever be the same. The ones who were "they" yesterday are "us" today, and "we" are forever changed.

Election 2004: A Christian perspective on stem cell research

Foothills, Los Altos held a standing-room-only forum on stem-cell research in June, cosponsored by the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

Stanford's Dr. Paul Berg, a Nobel Laureate in biochemistry, and Law Prof. Henry Greely, laid out the scientific, moral, legal, ethical, and political issues.

Foothills' Jane Turnbull and Pat Frischmann of the League organized the event because, they said, "It's a high-profile subject. In November, Californians will vote on whether to fund a stem cell research institute. Senator John Kerry wants more federal funding for stem cell research, as does the family of former President Ronald Reagan, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. President George W. Bush continues to fa-

vor funding restrictions."

What excites scientists and physicians about embryonic stem cells is their ability to differentiate themselves into many kinds of human tissue.

"In experiments with mice, stem cells have generated insulin, which is a potential benefit in juvenile diabetes," Dr. Berg said. Stem cells also have produced dopamine, which reduces the effects of Parkinson's disease. The cells have repaired spinal cord damage in mice.

Even if stem cell research receives funding, Greely and Dr. Berg cautioned, any treatments are likely five to ten years away.

Turnbull said the ethical and theological issues are comparable to the DNA recombinant issue of the mid-70s. "The potential for

misuse was real then and is real now, but as thinking and caring people, we are granted the capability and responsibility for making good decisions regarding appropriate use.

"In the mid-70s, the major players in DNA recombinant work got together at Asilomar to determine what constraints should be put on that research. They did a good job of defining the importance of having ethical panels to assess the research proposals. I would expect that a similar process could be instituted in the case of stem cell research."

Turnbull reminded the audience that the 2001 General Synod of the UCC in Kansas City passed a resolution calling on President Bush to release federal funds for embryonic stem cell research. His

executive order the following month banned the funding for new lines.

The resolution was presented by Olivia White, then a professor of genetics and ethics at the University of North Texas, and now Executive Minister for Wider Church Ministries for the UCC.

One of her concerns was that privately-funded research using human embryos is already taking place, without regulation or oversight from government agencies. This could lead to abuses of embryos in the research process, including payment to women for harvesting eggs for research.

Federally-funded research, she says, would conform to guidelines established by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that mandate that stem cells used in this research

be from excess embryos created for fertility treatment only; no embryos would come by way of the abortion process or harvested in exchange for payment.

The church resolution also calls for research to be conducted with "concern for justice, privacy and access to the benefits of the research for all."

The General Synod also adopted a resolution calling for the church and its members to take an active part in the "ongoing dialogue on the ethics of genetic science and technology."

That's exactly what Foothills UCC, Los Altos was doing!

(Please let us know what your church is doing to educate and encourage voters on this year's issues.)

South Pacific musical presents church's theme of 'Acceptance'

Editor's note: Almaden Valley, San Jose, has a five-year plan, with a different theme each year. This year's theme is "Acceptance." The members of the church, along with their "Joint Venture" partner, the Episcopal Church in Almaden, recently staged in their sanctuary a full performance of Rogers and Hammerstein's classic musical "South Pacific" with cast and full orchestra from both churches. Joint Venture Music Director John Leslie directed the show and wrote this piece for the program.

This year's theme at Almaden Valley is "Acceptance."

Do we accept the rules and laws set upon us by society and government? Employers? Church? God?

Do we graciously accept all the undesirable things that come to us in this life, as well as blessings? Health/illness? Financial security/unemployment? Caring friends/loss of loved ones? Tropical climate/natural disasters? Peaceful homes/international terror?

Do we accept people who are thrust into our peaceful, calm bubbles? At work? In our families (in-laws)? At church?

Do we accept people who are "different" genders? Size and shape? Color of skin? Language/dialect? Wealthy/homeless? Superhumans/physically and mentally challenged?

Do we accept ecumenical marriage? Interracial? Same-sex?

Many of these poignant topics are part of the story in our sum-

mer World War II musical, "South Pacific," which opened on Broadway 65 years ago.

It is a love story about two couples and the development of their passion but also deals in a large part with war and prejudice. As one of the songs states: "You've got to be taught to hate and fear... You've got to be taught before it's too late, to hate all the people your relatives hate."

In this way the composers present the idea that prejudice and non-acceptance are learned in your environment, rather than being born in you.

Please enjoy all the performers, the story and the music, but also be inspired to assess the levels of acceptance in your world.



"South Pacific" cast and orchestra were all from Almaden Valley, San Jose and their partner Episcopal church with which they share many programs and worship space. Photo: Bart Smith (also Captain Harbison, second from left.)