

'Christ's resurrection rings the earth like a bell'

By Mary Susan Gast

On the day after Christmas, beneath the Indian Ocean, one huge tectonic plate wedged itself below the tip of another. This was the earthquake which launched the tsunami which set off death and injury of staggering degree, devastation of homes and livelihood beyond imagining, and grief that will send shuddering shockwaves through generations. And there are planetary reverberations yet to be understood.

"The quake rang the earth like a bell," researchers from Columbia University reported. The earth wobbled on its axis. The North Pole moved an inch. Our planet spun 3 millionths of a second faster, "causing the length of a day to shrink permanently," according to calculations from the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory here in California.

We had just been reading John the Baptist's word that "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth." He was referring, of course, to a geography of the spirit, and a preparation of human hearts and history, a transformation of

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creation so profound that all that had been fierce and terrifying would be gentled. The stony mountains of oppression and resentment would crumble. The valleys of grief and desperation would no longer lurk as pits. The twisted pathways of our hearts would unspool so that we would not wander off onto dead ends or constantly coil back upon ourselves.

And we would be flooded with good news of great joy. That to us is born a Savior. Someone who rescues us from all that is death-dealing by offering us the full and abundant life of all-embracing reconciling, compassionate love. That this baby, this Messiah, this bearer of New Life, crushes mountains, raises valley floors, causes

earth tremors by upending the foundations of everyday politics and economics; sloshes through the spilled waters of the rivers of pain and woe, in rushing wild exuberance just to be with us.

And now we have passed through the rigors of Lent's wilderness, into Easter. The demands of The Most High thunder onto shore like the majestic rolling surf. And as they recede we find ourselves not only chastened, but awed and replenished. The sparkling sand at our feet shimmers with the promise of resurrection.

One of our sages, Browne Barr, wrote about resurrection in an article that appeared in The Christian Century over 20 years ago. If the Resurrection is real—if Jesus is the Messiah—then life makes sense for us as Christians, Browne wrote. But it only makes sense on God's terms, not ours.

The Resurrection means that The Author of the Universe is intent on the fulfillment of just and loving purposes, the Ancient of Days is in dead earnest about the establishment of a realm of equity and peace. It proclaims that all our narrow allegiances are doomed if they are not prompted by love for God and neighbor. "For this is the

message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." [1 John 3: 11] The resurrection rings the earth like a bell.

"Are you the Messiah?" the disciples asked the risen Jesus.

"Look around," Jesus said, "see what I have done." The sick are healed, the needy are made whole, the rejected are loved, the guilty are unburdened. People crushed by guilt are not let off the hook for their evil deeds, but are granted restoration to life. Creation testifies to strength in weakness, wisdom in foolishness, victory in defeat, life in the barren caverns of death, the triumph of powerless love over loveless power.

The resurrection sends shockwaves through generations of stolid despair and gelid complacency. The Messiah has come—as Jesus of Nazareth who collided with the mighty and colluded with the needy, in league and in love with this hodgepodge humanity.

This is the no-holds-barred, full-tilt, in extremis truth of the Resurrection. It wobbles the earth on its axis and dislodges our old point of reference. Its reverberations are yet to be fully understood.



April 2

Administration & Finance and Assets Management & Development, working group of the NCNC Board meet together, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., Conference Office, David Bergman-Hill, 510-247-2028.

April 2

Outdoor Ministries Committee, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., location to be determined, Barbara Broadbent, 510-247-8996.

April 9

Executive Committee, Board of Directors, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Conference office, Faith Burgess, 650-591-0994.

April 9

Sacramento Valley Association Annual Meeting, 9a.m. - 2p.m., Oroville UCC, Susan Hamilton.

April 9

Overview Board for Justice and Witness Ministries, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., Arlington UCC, Kensington, Drew Nettinga, <revnet@cs.com>

April 10

Mountain Valley Association Annual Meeting, 3 p.m., Via Dolorosa, Modesto, Dale Pederson, First Congregational of Salida, Acting Moderator.

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Seventeen churches learn to 'spice up' church school

By Barbara Broadbent

Fremont Congregational UCC hosted members of 17 NCNC churches on February 26 for a program called "Kick It Up A Notch: Spicing Up Your Church School Program."

Presenters were Betsy Woodward, Commissioned Minister of Education, Congregational UCC, San Mateo; Donna

Lindsay, Director of Christian Education, Ladera UCC, Portola Valley, and Rev. David Howell, Associate Pastor, First Congregational UCC, Palo Alto.

They shared resources and ideas regarding children in worship, suggested ways to supplement curriculum, such as music and drama, described the Rotation Model, and offered ways to evaluate Christian Education plans.

As Associate Conference Minister for and Outdoor and Educational Ministries, I help to promote and recruit UCC Partners in Education, a group of consultants in Christian Education, trained by

UCC Local Church Ministries. NCNC Partners are available to consult with local churches and help with planning and resourcing on a wide variety of issues.

At this event we also encouraged and offered to help church educators network with others in their association/area through the Association of United Church Educators (AUCE).

I am starting an E-mail group to help with networking on educational issues. Interested people should e-mail me at bbroadbent@nncucc.org.

Churches represented at the February 26 workshop were: Congregational, Fremont; Filipino-American, Fremont; Niles Congregational, Fremont; Community Congregational, Benicia; First Congregational, Stockton; First Congregational, Palo Alto; Eden, Hayward; Arlington Community, Kensington; United, Vallejo; Sycamore Congregational, El Cerrito; Colledge Ave. Congregational, Modesto; Foothills Congregational, Los Altos; Congregational, San Mateo; Ladera Community, Portola Valley; First Congregational, Fresno; First Congregational, Redwood City and First Congregational, Oakland.



UCC Outdoor Ministries Consult: Rev. T. Shala Olivieri and Rev. Valerie Tutson review worship plans at the UCC Outdoor Ministries Association Consult XV, held March 4-8 at Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon Connecticut. Olivieri, a chaplain in Watsonville, is chair of the NCNC Outdoor Ministries Committee. Tutson, from the Rhode Island Conference, led worship and workshops at OMA Consult. Barbara Broadbent, associate conference minister for outdoor and educational ministries was a member of the OMA Consult Planning Team and also attended the event. Keynoter was Bertram Chatham of Stockton, a member of the board of United Camps, Conferences and Retreats.

Photo by Barbara Broadbent



Barbara Broadbent