

Tomorrow is the Islamic holiday with the Hebrew name, Ashura. One of its origins is that Mohammed met some Jews who were fasting on this day to mark the escape from Egypt by Moses, or Musa, and he joined them in the fast. It is a commemoration that Muslims link to Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, though Jews now celebrate the liberation from Egypt on Passover. It is also connected to the day Adam was forgiven by God, and the day Noah came out from the Ark. Shia Muslims mourn on this day in memory of the martyrdom of Hussain Ali, Muhammed's grandson. A mix of joy and sorrow, atonement and commemoration, division and reconciliation. The mix of life, the complex crossroads of culture shared and divided.

Our first hymn is green book #136, "In This Still Room"

Our first reading is a poem by the African American writer, June Jordan. "These poems  
they are things that I do  
in the dark  
reaching for you  
whoever you are  
and  
are you ready?  
These words  
they are stones in the water  
running away  
These skeletal lines  
they are desperate arms for my longing and love.  
I am a stranger  
learning to worship the strangers  
around me  
whoever you are  
whoever I may become."

A second reading comes from Genesis 11:1-9, “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward,<sup>[a]</sup> they found a plain in Shinar<sup>[b]</sup> and settled there. 3 They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”<sup>5</sup> But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building.<sup>6</sup> The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”<sup>8</sup> So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel<sup>[c]</sup>—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

And finally, from the Gospel of John 4:4-42. “Now he had to go through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.<sup>7</sup> When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.<sup>[a]</sup>)<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”<sup>11</sup> “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? <sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”16 He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”17 “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” 21 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”25 The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”26 Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”27 Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” 28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”33 Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still

four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. <sup>36</sup> Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. <sup>37</sup> Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. <sup>38</sup> I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."<sup>39</sup> Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."<sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. <sup>41</sup> And because of his words many more became believers.<sup>42</sup> They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

Our second hymn is green #135 "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Help us to see the blessing of difference and of perspectives far beyond our own personal sight and experience. Give us wisdom to blend and learn and go beyond the familiar, and let the Spirit enter from many directions, from many hearts, from many lives. Fundamental Truth only becomes whole in the aggregate and the totality, and cannot be expressed in one language or a single expression. Help us to worship the strangers around us and to wait on the sacred that is constantly revealed in new ways. Let us drink the blessed water offered that will become a spring in each of us, welling up, ever renewed. Let us recognize the many seekers on the many paths so that we fully share these journeys in love and hope. Let us live in the new of now, in expectation, in revelation, in insight, blending at the crossroads of joy and recognition, foreigners at home. Amen.

Our third fun hymn is Green book #231 "Joy in My Heart"

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear Friends, In preparing this message of collage and assembly and new beginnings and recovery, I learned so many interesting and complex things about how the occasion of Ashura, celebrated tomorrow, combines them. So many of the Ashura traditions, of being the thanks that Moses gave after the deliverance from Pharaoh's army, of being the exit from the ark by Noah, of being the martyrdom of Hussain Ali, of being the day Moses received the commandments, of being God's forgiveness of Adam are about the rising again from disaster, a new beginning after tragedy and struggle. A profound conflict that goes in a new direction. Ashura is also the name of a stew, sometimes called "Noah's pudding" that is also a mix, like all of these stories, that may or may not really go together in an obvious or typical way.

Modern Samaritan people are today very few, but through history were, and are, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, not simultaneously, but by family and village, what seems to be an incongruous mix. John's Gospel identifies this as directly traceable to an encounter with Jesus. An openness to a generally disliked group and what seems a disreputable person. The lack of purity or consistency may be exactly their strength and their contribution. When Islam first developed, it was unclear to practitioners if it were totally distinct from Judaism or Christianity or just another version of both. Both the difference and the sameness are interesting. One wonders if the issue of five husbands that Jesus does not belabor and that her community does not seem to reject might be more of a metaphor about a person who has been married to many different beliefs. A seeker for the living water.

This then gets us to consider the dangers of single-minded group think, of the negative power of a close-minded consistency and conformity. This may be the deeper and more sinister motivation

in the error of the people of Babel. The story could be seen as a warning about a phenomenon like white supremacy or white nationalism where a common language, a common way of thinking, a common background gets built up as better than any other and as the greatest, as dominant, as having particular favor or access to heaven. Not just overly proud, but overly exclusive. And so, we need to recognize that the variation and the many languages explained by the story are not a curse nor a punishment, and are never identified as such in the verses in Genesis. What God, the sacred, identifies as negative is that totalitarian, authoritarian sensibility in which no one disagrees and no one has a different view, where the language and thought process is overly simplified and so dominant that all energy goes in one direction, with an exaggerated sense of power and greatness. We learn so much more when we open ourselves to difference and listen, rather than assert. One great city with one spectacular tower is actually more vulnerable and far less tolerant than many villages of varied cultures and traditions. Being impressive can also be inhibiting and intimidating. The show of power, of empire, of dominance, can be repressive and narrowing.

There are ways that buildings can assert power, and for some, grand buildings with grand staircases and pillars feel great. They have a powerful sense of themselves as individuals who can walk right up those stairs and stand on that very visible platform at the front door, often oblivious to how such a building by its nature also excludes, intimidates, polices. In the face of such a building, there are many who would never venture up the stairs, who would look for a side door, who would have the wrong clothes, the wrong look, the wrong language to be so exposed on the white marble. Those who would build such palaces of exclusion need to be scattered among the masses. Entitlement is usually also blindness.

In our unprogrammed silence, we wait for the words we have not thought of, the words we haven't already heard, the words that

have not been planned and written down. We share and present our words as part of the many perceptions, the way that June Jordan describes her poetry:

“These poems  
they are things that I do  
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reaching for you  
whoever you are  
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These words  
they are stones in the water  
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These skeletal lines  
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I am a stranger  
learning to worship the strangers  
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Closing hymn is green #236 “Joy Is Like the Rain”

I am a stranger learning to worship the strangers around me  
whoever you are  
whoever I may become.