

MVLP “Gather ‘Round” E-News - Issue #67

April 30, 2021

This is the sixty-seventh issue of our E-newsletter, “Gather ‘Round,” to call us together through the internet to share news and needs and stories with each other. If you have a tale to tell or a perspective to share, please send it on for the next issue!

The Buildings Are Closed; The Church Is Open!

Back issues of “Gather ‘Round” E-news are available on the Moosup Valley Church website, thanks to our webmaster, Pat Safstrom. Go to moosupvalley.church and click on the tab at the top of the page.

Islam: Submission to the Will of God

Last week, we began to learn a little bit about Islam, one of the three great religions of the West (along with Judaism and Christianity), the one about which Christians like us often know the least but have much in common, Islam which teaches that we are to submit to the will of God. In fact, the name Islam comes from the Arabic root *salam*, which means “peace.” To achieve true peace of mind and heart, one must submit to the will of the One True Almighty God and live according to God’s divinely revealed Law.



Pastor Bob provided us with an introduction and brief history, which I included in last week’s “Gather ‘Round.” Today, we continue with his research into the Muslim’s faith and practice and the major split in the Islamic world between Shia and Sunni [like between Catholics and Protestants in Christianity].

The Faith and Practice of Islam

Muhammad did not claim to be the founder of a new religion. He was the final Prophet for that which he believed was God’s intention from the beginning of all time. God’s eternal and universal message was that humanity could find peace by submitting faithfully to God’s ways. Muhammad believed that God was fulfilling the promise made to Abraham who had submitted himself to God. Muslims see themselves as the latest in a long line of believers who followed the prophets.

The Qur’an (Koran, as we know it) is the Holy Book of Islam which contains the Revelations shared by God and directly memorized (and recorded) by Muhammad (and the first hearers). In contrast to many other religious books (including the Bible), the Qur’an was always thought to be the Word of God by those who believed it, as many Christians believe of our Bible. It was completed during Muhammad’s lifetime and did not require a Council (as in

Christianity) to determine which was and was not a part of the Revelation. It was shared aloud from its conception and memorized by many hearers for the intention of perfect transmission.

The Qur'an is addressed to all of humanity. It is not addressed to a particular tribe, nation, or "chosen people." Its message is nothing new. Peace is found by submission to the Almighty God and devotion to God alone. It contains stories of Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus – the great prophets before Muhammad. It is a book to help sort through the confusion and turmoil of this world and to fill the emptiness of our lives through the Revelations shared by God through God's Final Messenger, Muhammad.



In practice, Islam has **Five Pillars** that are essential for all Muslims to believe and to do, the obligations that Muslims must satisfy to live a good and responsible life and to bring them closer to God:

1. To believe in Allah [God] and His Messenger, Muhammad.
2. To pray five times a day: dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, night.
3. To fast at Ramadan, a month of prayer, reflection and community. (*Last week we took a longer look at Ramadan which Muslims are celebrating, now through May 12.*)
4. To give Alms to the Poor.
5. To make pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime.

A Muslim is committed to follow the Revelations to Muhammad and his example to seek God and fully submit to God's way. [*Do we not say the same about our Christian faith?*]

The Shia-Sunni Split

The followers of Islam are traditionally divided into two main branches, the Sunni and Shia, which split over the question of who would become Mohammed's successor after his death in the year 632 of the Christian Era. Today, the Shi'ite community is composed of several different branches, and there are large Shia populations in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, east Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen and Pakistan. The Sunnis compose the largest branch of Islam; their adherents can be found across North Africa, the Middle East, as well as in Asia and Europe. Each group, although they follow the same religion, interpret certain events and teachings of Islam differently.

The Shi'ites tend to be fundamentalists and envision a regime based on sharia, Islamic religious law, arguing for an Islam largely or completely unchanged from its original seventh-century version and take it as a requirement of their faith that they impose on everyone else and which takes precedence over civil laws. [*We see some of this thinking in Christian fundamentalism in matters of freedom of religion in this country, do we not?*]

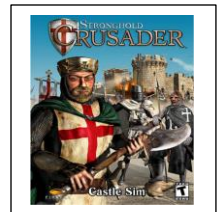
The clear majority throughout the Muslim world consists of Muslims who are loyal to the core creed, and who worship devoutly. Undoubtedly, the theological warrant for intolerance and violence is embedded in their own religious texts, but they are not inclined to practice violence or even intolerance towards non-Muslims.

Similarities and Differences

Islam has much more in common with Christianity than it has differences. Muslims, Jews, and Christians all believe the same foundations of God the Creator, and they all recognize the great prophets, including Jesus as a prophet. They all claim to worship the One, True God, and they believe in submission to God's Will as the Way to Life. Yet, even with those agreements, differences in beliefs have produced tragic results throughout the history of the three religious movements. Some of those differences are as follows.

Land

Over the land promised to Abraham: Jews and Muslims both claim the land that was promised by God to Abraham. The Muslim descendants of Ishmael and the Jewish descendants of Isaac have been fighting over the land since Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. Christians joined in the fight for the Holy Land, as they consider themselves spiritual descendants of the promise.



Divinity

Jesus as the Son of God vs. no human can be God. Muslims and Jews (and some Christians) believe that only God is Divine. They recognize Jesus as a human Rabbi or Prophet, but consider it blasphemy for any person to be considered divine. Christianity traditionally claims that Jesus is part of the Divine Trinity and, therefore, God.

Salvation

The Jews are still waiting for the Messiah. Traditional Christian thought is that He has come in the Name of Jesus, and that He was Divine. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the Last of the Great Prophets and shared God's Final Revelation. Islam teaches that God sent Jesus to rid Judaism of corruption and abuse by man. Similarly, Muhammad was sent to purify what had become of Jesus' teachings. Muslims teach that the difference between Muhammad and all other Prophets is that he is the 'Seal of the Prophets,' the final messenger to come before the end of time.

Revelation

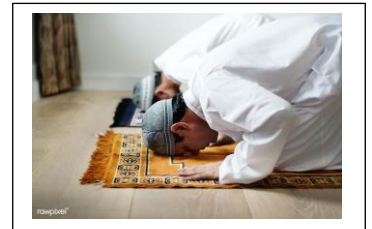
The **Jews** see their scriptures from Moses, the Torah, to be final: Deuteronomy 4:2, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you." The **Christians** see their Scripture as the last Word: Revelation 22:18-19, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll." The **Muslims** believe that Muhammad's is the Final Revelation. The Qur'an contains all the truth that had been revealed through the other books, bringing it to a final conclusion.

Peace

All three religions are interested in finding the Peace of God in the lives of believers, their community, and in God's world. Yet, all three have been guilty of atrocities in God's name. We tend to fear Muslim jihadists, yet we forget the Christian Crusades against Muslims and the Inquisition against the Jews. We forget even the violence committed by Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians in Northern Ireland. And yet, there is a large remnant within each faith that seeks connection, cooperation, respect, and peace as we seek to live out our faithful submission to the One, True God in Love and Service to all.

Summary

To be "Muslim" means to be "one who submits" (to the will of The One and True God.) It does not depend upon race, nationality, or ethnic background. It is totally dependent on one's willingness to submit to and live according to The Revelation in the Qur'an. Islam can be followed by anyone who declares and believes that there is only one God and that Muhammad was His final Messenger. It sees no difference between people other than in their deeds, *i.e.* race, wealth, nationality, etc., grant you no special status. It is *not* an Arab Religion. Indeed, more than 80 percent of Muslims around the world are of non-Arabic origins, including many who were born in the United States, some of them converting from Christianity to Islam. So, though it is true that most Arabs are Muslims, the large majority of Muslims are not Arabs.



All Muslims live in accordance with Shariah law, which covers how to find peace by following God's Ways as well as mundane control of all aspects of life, even down to how to wash after using the toilet and what food you can or cannot eat. (Muslims, for example, do not eat pork and do not consume alcohol.) However, interpretations within Shariah law can vary dramatically from topic to topic and from place to place.

Many scholars agree that the Quranic edict that there must be "no compulsion in religion" should form the basis of all laws. Hence, it is crucial to understand that Islam purposefully allows for difference of opinion; in fact, it is encouraged. This is why we see sometimes wildly different interpretations and practices between Muslims. Interpretations change from culture to culture, place to place, person to person, just as they do in Christianity.

Editor's comments: In my class on Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Divinity School, I realized that Christianity stressed orthodoxy, "right belief," whereas Islam stressed orthopraxy, "right action." Traditionally, we expect Christians to believe certain things; whereas in Islam, Muslims are expected to do certain things, i.e., pray five times a day – although this is an oversimplification. We see this tension in our own Christian thought, in our dialogue between faith and works, as in "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith" (James 2:18). Surely, both are important. Let us be open to

the many ways to be faithful, within each of our religions as well as between them, as in John Robinson’s parting words to the Pilgrims, “God hath more truth and light to break forth from God’s Holy Word.” This is where the United Church of Christ finds its grounding for “God is still speaking.” -Rev. Betsy

See How Alike We Are: Common Teachings

<p>Quotes from the Qur’an</p> <p><i>Here are some of Mohammed’s Revelations found in the Qur’an. Where do you find these ideas in our Christian tradition?</i></p>	<p>Quotes from the Bible</p> <p><i>Can you think of Bible verses, perhaps sayings of Jesus or something from the psalms or dearly loved ideas that echo the same trust?</i></p>
<p>Allah [God] is with you wherever you are.</p> <p>My mercy embraces all things.</p> <p>Surely Allah forgives all sins.</p> <p>Call upon me, I will respond to you.</p> <p>With hardship, there is relief.</p> <p>Treat not the orphan with harshness, nor repulse the petitioner unheard.</p> <p>We have not sent you, except as a mercy to the worlds.</p>	

Moosup Valley Sunday Service

Moosup Valley Church holds Sunday Worship by Zoom, at 10:30 a.m. Liturgy literally means “the work of the people,” and at Moosup Valley we take this to heart. Members of the congregation take part in reading, playing, and singing. This Sunday, May 2, we will hear the Gospel lesson from John 15:1-8, and Rev. Betsy’s Reflection, “Bearing Fruit.” This is a **Communion Service**, so please bring a bit of bread or cracker and something in a cup. Evie Mann will play “Meditation” by Massenet. Watch for the link and the Order of Worship bulletin which will be emailed on Saturday morning and will include everything you need to participate, all in one PDF document.

Rice City Worship

Worship at Rice City will be live, in person (with precautions) this Sunday, May 2, at 9:00 a.m. as well as online on the MVLP Facebook page Sunday morning and throughout the week. The Order of Worship will be emailed with Moosup Valley’s on Saturday morning.

Mount Vernon Wednesday Evenings

Mt. Vernon Baptist Church streams a live service on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m. The link: <https://www.facebook.com/MVLPspirit/?ref=bookmarks>). The Order of Worship will be emailed with Rev. Betsy's Order for Evening Prayer that morning.

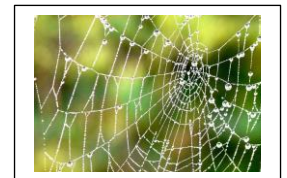
Evening Prayer

Moosup Valley holds Evening Prayer, Vespers, on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. by Zoom – a brief (20 minute) time of scripture, song, meditation and prayer, a time to give thanks for the day just past and praise to God. As appropriate, we also reflect on questions for the season. If you wish, please bring a candle to light. Let Rev. Betsy know if you would like to sing an evening hymn. It is acceptable to come in your PJs! The Order of Prayer bulletin is emailed early on Wednesdays, along with the Zoom link.



Special Prayers

Humanity is like an enormous spider web, so that if you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling... As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together. No one is an island. -Frederick Buechner



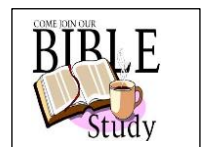
Please reach out and touch ...

- Michael Lavoie who has suffered a stroke and is in RI Hospital and his and Jeanne's son-in-law Ryan as he undergoes chemo treatment.
- All those who have lost loved ones recently: the family of Frank and Natalie Arnold, Bill McGrath, Phyllis Dexter and so many others....
- Rhoda Dexter who is now back in her apartment at Creamery Brook in Brooklyn, recovering from surgery.
- Judi White's mother, Joyce Chase, who had open heart surgery last week and is recovering well.
- Rocky Riccio, still in pain from COVID.
- Vicky Neville's sister, Carol, who is recovering from heart surgery.
- Martha's niece Rev. Mindy Reed as she deals with chronic life-threatening conditions.
- Joan and John's grandson, Christopher, who is experiencing a difficult time.
- Jim who will have long-awaited knee surgery on Tuesday, May 4.

- Barbara’s cousin Judy who is still holding her own with new treatments for tumors.
- Baby Wyatt, born prematurely on January 1 at 24 weeks, is now over 7 pounds, and the family hopes to bring him home soon.
- Jean Salemi, recovering from back surgery and awaiting the time we can all be physically together again.
- Richard Lucky who had another follow up procedure in Boston and is awaiting a safe time to be baptized at Rice City.
- Carol and Bob’s friend, Kathy, back in the hospital in Boston and knows that she will always have some of the pain that she currently is trying to endure.
- Linda’s son Peter, now that he is in his own apartment.
- Chris Crowther’s partner Jen who has qualified to receive a liver transplant.
- All those killed and mourned across the country in mass shootings. Pray that we can find ways to address mental illness as well as to rein in our love affair with guns!
- Our beloved country in the midst of persistent hostility and division.

Gather ‘Round for Bible Study – Now on Thursdays

Rev. Betsy leads Bible Study on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. by Zoom, now reading the Letter of James, which may have been written or inspired by Jesus’ brother, an early leader in the Jerusalem Church. To receive the Zoom link, contact Betsy.



A Hymn for Our Times: “We Limit Not the Truth of God”

George Rawson, 1853 (From the New Century Hymnal, # 316):

We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind,
to notions of our day and place, crude, partial, and confined;
No, let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred:
O God, grant yet more light and truth to break forth from your Word.

Who dares to bind to one’s own sense the oracles of heaven,
for all the nations, tongues, and climes and all the ages given?
That universe, how much unknown! That ocean unexplored!
O God, grant yet more light and truth to break forth form your Word.

Eternal God, Incarnate Word, Spirit of flame and dove:
enlarge, expand all living souls to comprehend your love;
And help us all to seek your will with wiser powers conferred:
O God, grant yet more light and truth to break forth from your Word.

A Closing Poem by a Muslim Mystic

Read by Dr. Wendy Manchester Ibrahim, RI Council of Muslim Advancement, at the RI Interfaith Poverty Conference earlier this April.



Poetry by Sufi Mystic Aru Barzak

The God who made the stars, the seas, the mountains and its peaks, the universe and its galaxies felt this world would be incomplete without me. Do you see how you are a puzzle piece in the whole-how without you here, there would be a hole? Your body is not just a clay tent that you live in, it's a piece of the universe you have been given. You are not a small star, you are a reflection of the entire cosmos. Can you hear the big bang in your heart? Eighty times a minute God knocks on the doors of your chest, to remind you that He has never left, that He is closer to you in the jugular vein in your neck (Quran chapter 50 verse 16). Every moment is divinely blessed, for this moment God is blowing the breath of life through 8 billion different human chests. You are not just star dust and dirt, you are a reflection of God's beauty on Earth. You are not this mortal body that death will one day take. You are an everlasting spirit held in the mortal embrace. of clay. You are not a human being meant to be spiritual, you are a spiritual a spiritual being living this human being miracle.



Church Offerings may be mailed for:

Mt. Vernon to Ron Allen (116 Barbs Hill Road, Greene, RI 02827),

Moosup Valley to Pat Safstrom (76 Moosup Valley Road, Foster, RI 02825), or go on the website (moosupvalley.church) and donate through PayPal.

Rice City to Robin Petrarca (105 Hopkins Hollow Road, Greene, RI 02827).

Reverend Betsy can be reached at BetsyAldrichGarland@gmail.com or 401-463-8697.

Pastor Bob can be reached at revbobh@gmail.com or 401-440-7831.