

Meditation

**Faith Church 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service**

February 10, 2019

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Sometimes churches plant new congregations to spread the gospel to new neighborhoods or cities, which is how Immanuel Church was formed out of Center Church. What happened 200 years ago between my church, the First Church of Christ in Hartford, and the congregation that became the Talcott St. Church and then Faith Church was not like that. It was more like an amicable divorce, where both sides know that something is not right and so they need to split. In this case one side, Center Church, could not overcome the deep-seated racism the members had been taught from birth. They did open their pews to African Americans, but those pews were always understood to belong to a white congregation, and so they put limitations on Black worshippers that would be hard to understand now, except that we still see racism and white privilege around us every day.

Nevertheless, Joel Hawes, the pastor of Center Church back then, made sure the new congregation had a place to worship and seed money to grow on. But the relationship between the churches was, and I use this gendered word intentionally, paternalistic rather than a covenant among equals, which is what we are supposed to be in a Congregational polity. It is important to tell the truth about the past, complicated and difficult as it is, so that we can see who we were, as we now imagine by the eyes of the Spirit who we might be today, and in the years to come.

We are not our ancestors, though the realities of 1819 are sometimes all too present today. Just listen to the news. (Blackface and KKK costumes in a medical school yearbook in the 1980's? Seriously?) As I thought about this relationship between our churches, the image that came to me was of a piece of fabric being torn. (Tear fabric)

Now 200 years ago, many of the women in Center Church and what became Faith Church would have practiced the art of Quilting. I learned how to quilt some years ago, and it's one of the many things I hope to get back to someday when I retire! Quilting is more complicated than it looks, and to make a large quilt by hand takes a lot of time and effort. It's done best by a group of people working together, which is how it used to be done in many churches.

Quilts are made from cut fabric, pieces that don't look alike, often, but when put together, form a delightful design. Quilting does not make fabric pieces whole again, as though they had not been torn. Rather it takes pieces and brings them together in the service of beauty and warmth and comfort, each piece having an equal part to play in the larger design.

Faith Church, Immanuel Church, and Center Church, as well as the other communities of faith around us, are pieces in the quilt that God has been creating, is creating, and will continue to create to bring love to a city which desperately needs the kind of love we have been taught in the scriptures, the love Jesus talked about when he said we should love others as he loves us. This love empowers us to move beyond all the ways the world would tear us and this city apart. The challenge before us every day is how we find ways to stitch together our gifts, our beauty, our love to serve God in the city of Hartford. Quilting works best if a group of people do it together. I believe we are up to the challenge. Amen.