For Congregation Emanuel 1/31/2020

Christian Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism

I have said in mixed company of Jews and Christians these words: If the original sin of America was slavery and racism, the original sin of the Church was anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, hatred of Jewish religion and hatred of the Jewish people. The church should confess this sin every year at the beginning of its Holy Season of Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday, so that we may help rid the world of the hatred we began and helped grow.

The Christian New Testament and its gospels show the beginnings of our anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. Jesus' conflict with Scribes and Pharisees was accentuated. Amy Jill-Levine, the Jewish professor of New Testament at Vanderbilt Divinity School has shown, especially in her book *"The Misunderstood Jew",* that Christian scholars and preachers have tried to make Jesus look good by making the Jews look bad. Many of the conflicts between the Pharisees and Scribes, on one hand and Jesus on the other were conflicts *among scribes and pharisees too*, so that many of the positions Christians have used to lionize Jesus can be found in Jewish sources of that time as well.

Then, there is the case of the Passion Accounts in the gospels which trace the last week of Jesus, from Palm Sunday to his crucifixion by Rome. If you

carefully read these accounts from the earliest in Mark, through the next gospels, Matthew and Luke to the final gospel John you see the "blame" for Jesus' death increasingly shifted from Rome to the Jewish people. And in John the term "The Jews" is almost always used in a negative sense. In the years of the last half of the first decade, CE, there was a painful divorce going on between the synagogue and church. And some of the things said on both sides were hurtful. The problem for Christians is that we've taken these words offered in the heat of the divorce and made them normative for Jewish/Christian relations.

In the next centuries, the hatred of the Jewish religion, anti-Judaism, became more and more also the hatred of the Jewish race, anti-Semism. Then it turned murderous when the Roman state and the Christian religion joined hands from the time of Constantine. Anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism were reinforced by the power of the State.

Over the centuries Jews were made to convert to Christianity under the penalty of death.

In the popular Medieval Passion Plays, the Jews were made the oppressive villains in the story. And in some a Jewish man was brought on stage and had his beard plucked out.

Martin Luther, the great German Reformer and founder of the Protestant Reformation, however heroic and brilliant, was terribly anti-Semitic, which we see in some of his writings. Germany became a place where anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism grew and grew. The pre-eminent German New Testament scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries emphasized the difference between Judaism and Christianity as they sought to promote the superiority of Christianity. No wonder then that the ground was made ready for Nazism, Hitler and the Holocaust. I've gone on too long, but Christians need to examine more closely our responsibility in anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. As Eli Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize recipient said, "We are not all guilty, but we are all responsible."