

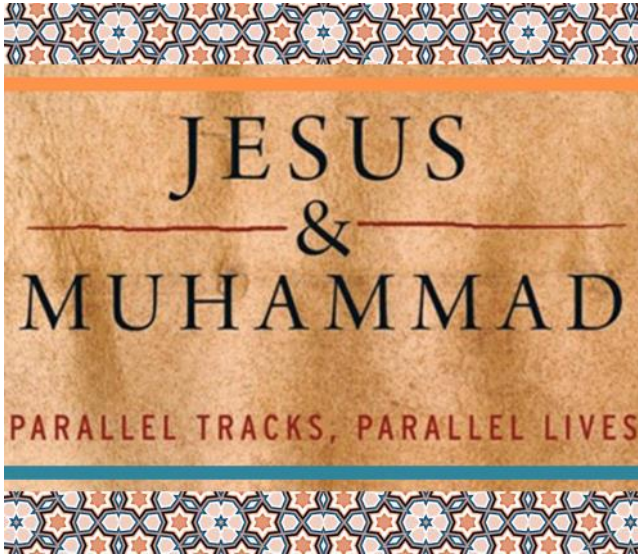
# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

May 17, 2015

*“Jesus Would Not Mock Muhammad”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
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## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

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***Live Life Fully Alive!***

**John 13:34-35**

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'*

**Matthew 15:21-28**

*Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.*

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*“Jesus Would Not Mock Muhammad”*

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A Muslim dies and goes to heaven. Jesus meets the Muslim at the Pearly Gates. Jesus gives the Muslim a tour of heaven. They come upon a big room. But the doors to the big room are closed. The Muslim says to Jesus “Who's in there?” Jesus says to the Muslim, “Shhhh, those are the Christians. They think they're the only ones up here.” (I apologize if you've heard this joke before. Or at least a variation of it.)

Jesus would not mock Muhammad. That's what I want to talk with you about today. Jesus would not mock Muhammad. Jesus would not mock anybody. He's Jesus! Of course Jesus never met Muhammad. Muhammad came along about 500 years after Jesus. But Hindus and Buddhists were around in Jesus' time. And as far as we know, Jesus did not mock Hindus or Buddhists. And I believe Jesus would not mock Muhammad. Usually people mock somebody or something, like a religious leader or a religion, out of fear or hate or both. I think when it comes to Islam, a lot of Americans are filled with fear or hate or both. For example, many Americans probably believe that Muslims make up a large percentage of the American population, like 20 or 30 percent. No. Just 0.5% of the American population is Muslim. One half of 1% of the American population is Muslim. Now I'm not trying, with this sermon, to convert anybody to Islam. I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian minister. And while I wish I knew more about Muhammad and Islam and the Quran, their holy scriptures, I at least know enough not to mock them. And I believe I know enough about Jesus to know that Jesus would not mock Muhammad. So why am I bringing this up?

In Texas a couple weeks ago, as you probably know, a group of people who are anti-Islam, you could even call them Islamaphobes - people who fear and hate Islam - decided to mock Islam and Muhammad. These were the same people who, a few years ago, tried to prevent an Islamic center from being built a few blocks from ground zero in New York City. Thankfully the Islamaphobes didn't succeed back then. This time, in suburban Dallas, they held a contest for who could draw the best cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad. As the Islamaphobes know, many Muslims are offended by mocking Muhammad by, for example, drawing cartoons of him. Just as many Christians were offended years ago when an art exhibit featured Jesus on a cross, upside down, in a glass of - how should I say this in church? - a glass of bodily fluid. Gross. Predictably, this recent offensive religious

event caused two angry Muslims to show up at the cartoon contest in Texas, armed to the teeth. (Although I think it's a state law in Texas that everybody, all the time, has to be armed to the teeth. I could be wrong.) Anyway, these two Muslims showed up ready to kill people. Instead, they, themselves, were killed by the authorities.

Don't get me wrong. I condemn what those two angry Muslims were planning to do: probably kill as many people at that cartoon contest as they could. And I commend the authorities for stopping them. And I defend the First Amendment rights of the people putting on that cartoon contest. It's just that I believe the cartoon contest would offend Jesus, because Jesus would not mock Muhammad. Of course, Jesus did call the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes - the religious right of his day - he did call them hypocrites and a brood of vipers. But Jesus wasn't mocking them. Jesus was chastising them for living by the letter of the law, but not by the spirit of it. I know, some Christians believe that Jesus only loves Christians and would hate Muslims. So they think it's perfectly fine to make fun of, mock, or attack Muslims and people of other faiths. And I know, some Muslims are terrorists and have killed people on American soil - on 9-11 and at the Boston Marathon. But I also know that some Christians are terrorists and have killed people on American soil - at the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing and at an abortion clinic bombing that killed an off-duty police officer, who was a security guard there. No faith has a monopoly on virtue. So how do I know that Jesus would not mock Muhammad? I'm glad I asked.

Three stories. First story. A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, a non-Jew, cried out to Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus told her he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Still, she begged Jesus to heal her daughter. Then Jesus told her it isn't fair to take the children's food and give it to the dogs. The

woman said to him, yes, but even dogs get crumbs that fall from the master's table. Jesus told her great is her faith and her daughter was healed instantly. Second story. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. A man was walking from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers beat the man and left him for dead by the side of the road. Two people passed him by. But then a Samaritan helped the man: bandaged him up, took him to the nearby Motel 6, and paid for his room for a few days, so he had time to heal. Third story. The night that Jesus was betrayed, he said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."

These three stories, I believe, show that Jesus was interfaith. The first story. The Gentile woman, the non-Jew, caused Jesus to realize that he didn't come just for the children of Israel. He came for all the children of God. The second story. Jesus is telling his Jewish disciples that Samaritans - whom the Jews hated - are good; that non-Jewish people are good. He was telling his Jewish disciples to get over their tribal loyalties and see every one as good. (Or at least potentially good.) The third story. Jesus tells his disciples to love one another. And not to just love each other. But to love every one. And Jesus is telling us to love every one. Not to just love those who go to Menifee UCC. But to love every one. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and atheists. That's why I made my recent Installation Service interfaith. That's why I invited a Rabbi, an Imam, a Mormon, a New Thought minister, a Methodist minister, and ministers from the United Church of Christ to speak. Because I was following the teachings of Jesus, who said to love one another. And that's why, I believe, Jesus would not mock Muhammad.

An interfaith gathering was held in Michigan years ago. A rabbi, a minister, and other religious people were there. It was an

outdoor event. I went there. This was many years before I became a minister, but obviously I was interested in spiritual matters even back then. As the rabbi and the others took their turns speaking on stage, a group of people in the audience were rudely talking and laughing and carrying on. Then a church group was invited up on stage. It was the rude group. They were carrying some kind of banner that was covered up. When they got up on stage they introduced themselves. Then they unveiled the banner. It said, "JESUS." And they were all excited. Ah yes, JESUS. That was pretty much their entire presentation at this interfaith event.

I felt bad for them and I felt sad for them. I felt bad for them, because they didn't comprehend the nature of interfaith understanding. And I felt sad for them, because they didn't comprehend the nature of religion. Religion is not about competition. Let me say that again. Religion is not about competition. One more time. Religion is not about competition. (Say to those around you: Religion is not about competition. Religion is not about competition. Religion is not about competition.) Religion is not like a competition between the LA Dodgers and the Detroit Tigers. Who is God competing against? God? That's nonsense. That makes no sense. Religion is about cooperation. God doesn't want religious rivalries, which can lead to religious wars. God wants religious cooperation. What difference does it make to God if someone realizes that they are a child of God through Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam? If someone becomes a Muslim, Christians shouldn't be like that old TV commercial: Lost another one to Ditech. Christians should celebrate that someone who thought they were just a child of creation, came to realize that they are a child of God. Rejoice. God does. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "In my Father's house there are many mansions." Again, that's why, I believe, Jesus would not mock Muhammad.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “I Have A Dream Speech,” in Washington D.C. back in 1963, spoke of a dream that one day “all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands.” I believe Dr. King’s dream would also include Muslims and Hindus, Buddhists and people of all faiths joining hands. Certainly I believe Dr. King would not mock Muhammad. Just as I believe that Jesus would not mock Muhammad. So, why am I bringing this up today? And what does this have to do with you?

Live life fully alive. That’s what I say the goal of this church is, to help you to: Live life fully alive. To live life fully alive, I believe, means to live outside our box. To live outside our Menifee UCC box. To live outside our Christian box. To live outside our religious box. Now you may not agree. And that’s okay. Because the UCC encourages us to think for ourselves. It’s just that I believe to follow the teachings of Jesus means we have to love one another, we have to love everyone. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and atheists. And I believe when Jesus says to love everyone, Jesus means to love everyone. And I believe Jesus especially means not to mock anyone.

Let us pray...

*God of Love,  
Help us not to mock anyone.  
Help us to love everyone.  
And help us to know that everyone means everyone.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism