

April 2, 2010

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Pesach!

This week, for the first time in my rabbinate, I led a Passover seder in a correctional facility. The chaplain at the Strafford County Department of Corrections facility told me recently that two inmates had asked for some type of celebration of Passover. I was told that I could bring matzah, grape juice, a seder plate and a haggadah, and I received permission to bring in my "travel" guitar as well. On the morning of March 31, before I left Temple, I emptied out my pockets (as I usually do when I go to meetings of the Spiritual Advisory committee there), taking only my driver's license holder and my keys (car and Temple only). I was able to find my way through the right doors and stairs to get to the unit where I was set to do my seder. The two inmates joined me for many of the regular prayers. We chanted the Kiddush. We sang Mah Nishtanah, Avadim Hayinu, Dayeinu and Eliyahu Hanavi. We poured drops for the ten plagues. We ate matzah and, in the absence of charoset, we dipped our matzah in our grape juice. We created, for a few moments, a microcosm of the worldwide Jewish community marking Passover as a festival of freedom, with the hope that these two men would be able to enjoy actual individual freedom as soon as possible. I left the jail, returned to Temple, put my wallet, my Blackberry, my full set of keys, and my card case back into my pockets. I was back to the normal realm of freedom, but I knew that we had created a momentary "pocket" of liberty in the jail through the prayers and practices we shared.

Freedom is a gift to be treasured, and one that we can create inside of ourselves and in our community even when, all around us, we may feel that there are aspects of liberty which we need to work hard to preserve. Through right choices and actions, may we do all we can to split the seas that may stand

*in our way and move forward to our own "promised land,"
whatever that "land" might be. Happy Passover!*

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry