

TORAH! TORAH! TORAH!
Sermon, October 23, 2022
Christian Education Sunday
Psalm 1; II Timothy 3:14 – 4:5

“Torah” is the Hebrew word which is translated as “Law” in Psalm 1 (*and in Psalm 19:7, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”*). Torah can be narrowly defined as the Books of the Law, the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. But there are at least three other senses the word Torah can be defined, three more general ways this Hebrew term could apply:

- (1) Torah can have a wider meaning (*and is used this way often in the Old Testament*) which embraces all directives, all instruction, all ordinances from God. Torah in that sense means *all* of God's words, both the divinely inspired written words and the spoken words.
- (2) As the New Testament affirms Jesus as the living Word of God, the fullest expression of God, He might be described as the Torah of God, in the flesh.
- (3) Torah comes from a root word which means to “throw” or “cast.” In this sense, “Torah” is simply how things are “cast” (*as in, “the die is cast” ... “die” being the singular noun of “dice”; the Latin expression “Lacta eea est,” “the die has been cast,” is credited to Julius Caesar as he crossed the Rubicon*). Torah it is how things **are** in this created order. In other words, in this sense Torah is the wisdom of the Creator that is built into the very warp and woof of His creation, permeating the structure of all things; it is in the intelligent design of all things so obvious to the unbiased observer right down to the very molecules. It's been said that, in a sense, all fields of study ultimately become the study of theology ... theology is the queen of sciences, because all things reveal something of the nature and wisdom and divine order of the Creator God. We have made a somewhat artificial distinction between the natural laws of physics and ethical laws of morality; but in this sense of Torah *ALL* of God's laws are **natural laws**. God's moral laws are natural laws built into the very warp and woof of His created order. We violate the bounds of these gracious laws, and we suffer destructive consequences. God's moral laws are as much a part of His created order as is the natural law of gravity. To delight in Torah, to meditate on it, is to open our minds and hearts to see the wisdom of the Creator **of** all things **in** all things and to seek to live in accord with how things are. Incidentally, when God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah about putting his law in His people's minds and writing it on their hearts, He is speaking of an act of **restoration**, not creation. It had been there before, as part of the created order, but was broken in the fall. God is speaking of the salvation and restoration that will come in the New Covenant, reorienting broken hearts and minds, bringing them back into accord with His Torah, His law, with the entire created order.

“**Tora! Tora! Tora!**” (no “h”) was the name of the epic movie released in 1970 about Pearl Harbor. I watched it again Friday night. “**Tora! Tora! Tora!**” was the code phrase used by Mitsuo Fuchida, the Imperial Japanese Navy commander of the 353 military aircraft, including fighters, bombers and torpedo bombers that took off from six carriers on Dec. 7, 1941, and attacked Pearl Harbor. “**Tora! Tora! Tora!**” was the code announcing that total surprise had been achieved ... no alarms, no anti aircraft fire, no on ground activity as the 353 planes appeared in the skies over Hawaii ... and it was the all clear signal to Admirals Nagumo and Yamamoto that the attack on Pearl Harbor was on. “Tora” is the Japanese word for “tiger.” The word reflects the boldly courageous, lethally powerful, lightning quick action characteristic of the tiger, but was also an abbreviation for *totsugeki raigeki*, “lightning attack.”

Mitsuo Fuchida, by the way, became a Christian after the war and eventually became a missionary and evangelist. Two huge faith influences in his life were two Americans: One was Peggy Covell, a nurse who treated Japanese prisoners of war with gracious kindness, despite the fact that Japanese soldiers had killed her missionary parents in the Philippines (*see bulletin insert copied on the back*). The other was Jacob DeShazer, a U.S. serviceman who had become a Christian missionary to postwar Japan. DeShazer was a staff sergeant with the Doolittle Raiders who conducted the first air strikes on Japan six weeks after Pearl Harbor; he was on the crew of Doolittle Raid Plane #16, all eight crewmen were captured by the Japanese; he was a prisoner of war for some forty months, and suffered severe physical abuse. He returned to Japan in 1948. Doolittle Raider Jacob DeShazer and Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese captain who led the Pearl Harbor attack, often preached to large crowds together; they brought to thousands the message of God's grace and reconciliation, speaking of the power of forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ, the hope proclaimed in the **Torah! Torah! Torah!** of God's good and gracious ways. It's a bit of a stretch for a catchy sermon title, but hey ... it works for me! The one who basically launched the attack with “**Tora! Tora! Tora!**” had his life radically changed by his meditation on “**Torah, Torah, Torah**” -- the word of God, the son of God, and the gracious way of God in all things.

Psalm 1 asserts, "*Blessed is the man who delights in the Law, the Torah, of the Lord, who meditates on it day and night.*" The original word "blessed" is plural in form, implying that a multitude of blessings are in store for such a person ... and it is not some far off heavenly reward, but it's down-to-earth multitude of blessings here and now. Where is such blessedness found? Well, first we are told by the Psalmist where it is *not* found. "*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of (or, follow the advice of) the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.*" It's not that the sinners and the scornful are to be totally avoided; good luck trying to do that ... in the end, all of us would end up avoiding ourselves, which is hard to do. It's their contagiously negative influence that has to be resisted, countered by one who unabashedly delights in the three-fold Torah of God. Don't follow the advice of those who don't consider God, don't walk alongside them in their attitudes and actions, don't take your stands for the wrong things they stand for, don't join in with their cynical, catty, critical, scornful conversation, conversation that more often than not scoffs at good people and the things of God. By contrast, when we keep company with those who are trying to walk in godly ways, who are trying to stand for good things, holy principles, and engaging in wholesome and uplifting and encouraging conversation, those same attitudes are strengthened and nurtured in us as well! So much of Christian living is caught, not taught. There is great value in just having good, godly people together, encouraging each other in good conversation, wholesome fun, constructive activity, learning about God and His ways.

That's why we want people of good character engaged in our Christian education programs and working with children and adults who will help all of us delight in **Torah, Torah, Torah**; people of good and godly character like the Sunday School teachers and other Christian Education volunteers who have responded to the call to help others delight in the law of the Lord, and who will soon stand before you to be commissioned. The positive and nurturing and enduring influence of the character and attitudes of good people can have such an impact, an impact that can last a lifetime and even longer, even onto generations, long after the words of lesson plans and sermons are forgotten. That's one reason why it's so important to have people of quality character, *blessed* people, engaged in such ministry. And now I invite our Sunday School Co-superintendents to come forward to help lead our Service of Commissioning.

COMMISSIONING OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TEACHERS

(Adapted from *The Worshipbook*, "Order for the Public Worship of God," pp. 100-101)

Those appointed to teach will stand as the following Scriptures are read:

"Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." (*Deuteronomy 6:4-7*)

"Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age." (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

In unison, the congregation shall respond (adapted from Psalm 78:3-7)

"WHAT WE HAVE HEARD AND KNOWN FOR OURSELVES AND WHAT OUR ANCESTORS HAVE TOLD US MUST NOT BE WITHHELD FROM THEIR DESCENDANTS, BUT BE HANDED ON BY US TO THE NEXT GENERATION; THESE IN THEIR TURN WILL TELL THEIR OWN CHILDREN SO THAT THEY, TOO, MAY PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE IN GOD, REMEMBER THE WORKS OF GOD, AND KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD."

The Pastor will address the teachers, saying:

You have been called by our Lord Jesus Christ to a special work and ministry. As teachers of the Word of Truth, you will announce God's good law to each new generation, and tell of Jesus Christ, so others may know Him, love Him, and live His truth in the world."

Do you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, and through Him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" (*"We do."*)

Will you study the Scriptures and the confessions of the church, so that with intelligence, imagination and love you may call men and women, boys and girls to faith in Jesus Christ and train them as His disciples?" (*"We will."*)

The congregation shall stand, and the Pastor will address them, saying:

"Our Lord ordered His church to teach those who are baptized. Do you, the people of this church, promise to prayerfully support and encourage these men and women as they teach the good news of the Gospel, helping their students know all that Christ commands?" (*"We do."*)

All are to join in this Affirmation of Faith taken from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38:

"What does God require in the fourth commandment?"

FIRST, THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BE MAINTAINED, AND THAT I DILIGENTLY ATTEND CHURCH, ESPECIALLY ON THE LORD'S DAY, TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD, TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HOLY SACRAMENTS, TO CALL PUBLICLY UPON THE LORD, AND TO GIVE CHRISTIAN SERVICE TO THOSE IN NEED. SECOND, THAT I CEASE FROM MY EVIL WORKS ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, ALLOW THE LORD TO WORK IN ME THROUGH HIS SPIRIT, AND THUS BEGIN IN THIS LIFE THE ETERNAL SABBATH.

The Pastor will address the teachers, saying:

"By the authority of the session of the Greenwood Community Church, Presbyterian, you are now commissioned to teach in the church. Be energetic, be diligent, be honorable, and most of all, be faithful to Christ our Lord and His church as you carry out the work of this ministry!"

The congregation shall pray in unison for the teachers, saying:

ALMIGHTY GOD: IN EVERY AGE YOU HAVE APPOINTED TEACHERS TO TELL OF YOUR POWER, GOODNESS AND LOVE. WE THANK YOU FOR THESE WHO WILL TEACH OTHERS YOUR WAYS. BY THE POWER OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, GRANT UNTO THEM SPECIAL GIFTS TO DO THEIR SPECIAL WORK. MAY THEY BE FAITHFUL VESSELS OF YOUR SON OUR LORD, MAY THEY SPEAK HIS TRUTH TO THOSE ENTRUSTED TO THEIR CARE, AND MAY THEY BE EMPOWERED AND EQUIPPED TO LIVE THE LIFE OF FAITH, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO TAUGHT US TO PRAY,

"OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER, AMEN."

The Strange Love of Peggy Covell

Susan Verstraete

Peggy Covell had every right to hate the Japanese.

She grew up in Japan, where her parents served as missionary teachers in a middle school. In 1939 it became clear that the country was unstable and so, for their safety, the family was relocated to the Philippines. Peggy completed High School in Manila in 1940 and then returned to the United States to go to college. Her younger brother and sister came along, as her parents, Jim and Charma, wanted to keep all the children safe from the deteriorating political situation in Asia. Time would prove this to be a wise precaution.

Manila was captured by Japanese troops on January 2, 1942. Jim and Charma fled inland with the rest of their missionary team to a remote mountain hideout they christened "Hopevale." For two years they lived peacefully among Filipino friends, and held worship services in a deep ravine they dubbed "The Cathedral in the Glen." As many as 100 people attended their services, singing hymns, praying and listening to the missionaries teach in the beautiful forest.

All that ended on Sunday morning, December 19, 1943. Japanese soldiers captured Hopevale, and sentenced the missionaries to death. All of them, even the children, were to be executed the next day. On December 20th, the missionaries asked for time to pray together and read their Bibles. Then, one by one, still singing hymns, they were escorted up the mountain and beheaded. Their bodies were thrown into a hut and burned.



Peggy didn't learn of her parent's fate until after the war. And when she did hear, her hatred for the Japanese burned white-hot. Every day she struggled. Her hatred threatened to overwhelm her faith.

Then one day, she wondered, "Before my parents were slain, they asked for thirty minutes to pray to God. What was that prayer?"

Knowing her parents as she did, she was certain of the answer. Peggy was convinced that her parents had surely asked God to forgive their executioners. If her parents forgave them, how could Peggy do less?

I imagine that Peggy's first day working at the Japanese internment camp in Colorado was a trade-off. She came to serve the prisoners to demonstrate forgiveness. And as she helped the men, she increased in her ability to forgive. In fact, her loving, gentle way of nursing and conscientious care for the men as a volunteer at the camp touched even the hardest hearts.

"Why do you do this?" they asked, and her gentle reply was, "Because the Japanese army killed my parents. But the Holy Spirit has washed away my hatred and has replaced it with love."

The men could not fathom such love, and were haunted by her story even after returning to Japan. The story of Peggy's forgiveness was told over and over.

One former prisoner told the story to Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese national hero who led the air raid on Pearl Harbor. Peggy's story motivated Fuchida to search the Bible to find the source of her strange love. He found forgiveness in Christ. Later, when Fuchida became an evangelist, he told Peggy's story all over Japan, inviting his conquered people to the grace he had found.¹

It was exactly what Peggy's parents would have wanted.

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¹ Fuchida, Mitsuo *From Pearl Harbor to Calvary*, eChristian, 2011, pages 44-47