

Devotion, Week of April 26, 2026 – Fourth Week of Eastertide

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This past week I attended Come See Columbia Day at the seminary, as we honored a student who received the Columbia Friendship Circle scholarship for this year. This scholarship is given by Presbyterian Women of the Synods of the Southeast and Living Waters each year. It provides full tuition to a student who has family responsibilities, who demonstrates academic excellence and financial need, and who commits to serving the church upon graduation.

As part of this day, we worshiped together and heard a sermon by the Rev. Dr. Ann Clay Adams, Associate Dean, and we were also able to visit a seminary class. Debbie Bray and I attended Dr. Bill Brown's class on "Sacred Tension: Embracing Dissonance and Dialogue in the Old Testament." Dr. Brown is an Old Testament scholar who has written numerous books and translated all of the Psalms from the Hebrew for the new Common English Bible. We discussed differing stories in the Bible and how to deal with that dissonance, such as the two creation stories in Genesis. We also talked about dialogue ("dia" – across, through, and "logos" – word, in the Greek). Dr. Brown's point was that dialogue is not about finding common ground, but finding a deeper understanding and respect for each other.

The author James Baldwin said "We can disagree and still love each other, unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist." Wow – powerful words – and still as important today as they were in the civil rights era of the 1960's. We need to listen with respect and openness, and understand that differences are not deficiencies. The goal of dialogue is not to win, but to share. We need to remember that there is no shame in changing one's mind – look at the dialogues of God and Abraham, and Jesus and the Syrophenician woman!

I hope we can practice this form of dialogue as the world around us continues to rant and rave in hate speech and lack of respect in conversations.

Jeanne