Yom Kipur Morning 5783 Congregation Beth Evergreen

October 5, 2022 Rabbi Jamie Arnold

**“*Dvar Torah* Discussion:**

**The Pillar of Fire by Night,**

**Naming the Hard Conversations to Have”**

Over these high holidays, I’ve been highlighting **rituals of release**, ways to practice letting go. Releasing the past into the past, clearing out the ashes from the altar to keep the fire burning. Doing so requires us to go **into the smoke, the mist, the cloud, the ashes, the dust, the mud**. And doing so, I believe equips us to reengage with one another, to dialogue about what matters most and have the difficult conversations we’ve been avoiding.

On Rosh Hashanah, I spoke about the ***odot*** that arise from the *ayd*, the difficult conversations that arise from the mist, the cloud, the smoke, out of the ashes – between spouses like Abraham and Sarah, the topics that create firestorms four couples and families. But our tradition, our scriptures, our histories suggest that the fires, the lights, that guide us, need not consume us. It was, after all, a pillar of fire that guided our ancestors through the wilderness to the promised Land. So today, we ask one another, what are the collective odot, the hard conversations we, as a community, as a country, want to have in the coming year. I put the question to you now:

**What are the difficult conversations, the causes, that we as a community want to try to engage?**

[Congregants share their thoughts]

* “As a liberal, progressive, I’d like to hear and try to understand more conservative political perspectives.”
* Reproductive justice (Supreme Court)
* Establishment Clause and the threats to public education (Supreme Court)
* Mental health
* Threats to LGBTQ, especially the trans community
* Israeli – Palestinian Conflicts and Peace Prospects
* Ukraine and Russia
* Racial Justice, Anti-Black Racism
* White Nationalism and American White Supremacy

This year at CBE, we have several initiatives lined up. In terms of **dialogue and discussion**, we have launched an educational series devoted to “Taboo Topics.” A few weeks ago, we had an excellent showing for a conversation about Death, the first of our taboo topics, taking place on the first Wednesday of each month at 7 PM. Your suggestions today will be incorporated into our planning for future sessions.

We also have **action-oriented efforts** on the docket.

Later this month, our own Barbara Morris is leading a series to our southern border, taking a group of us **to Texas** to see firsthand what happening with immigration down there.

In terms of racial justice, some of you may remember that last year at this service, I proposed the creation of a new national holiday, an American Day of Atonement. Modeled on the power of this day of atonement on the 10th day of the Jewish new year, we partnered with interfaith leaders, the ADL, and our friend, Pastor Robert Martin, Jr. of Zion Temple Pentecostal Church and gathered on January 10 to begin to create a model to address and atone for the history and ongoing implications of racism in America. We are in the process of planning the second annual American Day of Atonement this coming January 10.

In addition, Marilyn Saltzman and I are doing a pilot program with David Jaffe called Dismantling Racism from the Inside Out [DRIO], applying the principles and practices of ***mussar*** [Jewish ethical discipline] to dismantling the conscious and unconscious biases at the root of racism.

As for Israel, and the challenges facing Israelis and Palestinians, I am planning to trip there in November with Rabbis for Human Rights in search of reasons for optimism, exploring grassroots efforts towards peace.

We are looking to you, to join us and lead us in efforts large and small, connecting us to the work you are doing in the world, and joining our ***tikun olam* havurah** – currently hosting our food drive, supporting local non-for-profits, recruiting volunteers for the upcoming Alternative Gift Fair and the Evergreen Shelter Program, which hosted record numbers of guests last year, and got started here at CBE.

We are a small mountain congregation, making an outsized impact on the community at large. May we go from strength to strength.

*Gmar hatimah Tovah.*