

Dear Friends,

During the past couple of weeks a few people have asked me why we at Shepherd of the Hill have invited Rohina Malik, Susan Stone, and Kim Schultz to give their artistic presentation, *Keeping Faith: Sisters of Story*. I have been asked if our providing a venue for Ms. Malik (a Muslim-American) and Ms. Stone (a Jewish-American) to share stories from their faith traditions alongside of Ms. Schultz (a Christian-American) is communicating the message that there is no real difference between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. A simple and direct answer to this concern is “no.”

*Sisters of Story* is not meant to be a great religious debate between the truth claims of these three religions. As the show’s promotional material states, the intention of the 90-minute program is to use stories from these three faiths “to counter the current rhetoric and to transcend our differences through [these women’s] shared belief in the power of connection, compassion, and unity.” In other words, the intention of this artistry is to reveal a common humanity that exists between three women who were created in God’s image and can trace their faith traditions back to a single biblical character, Abraham.

This, of course, does not mean that there is no difference between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. There are obvious differences. But, among the followers of these three religions, there are also great similarities. We begin with what we have in common: we are all created by God and bear God’s image. It is the second article of the *Apostles’ Creed* (“We believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, Our Lord”) that marks the heart of the differences between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. To say that there are no differences or that those differences do not matter does not honor Christ or Judaism and Islam. But, that does not mean that we cannot be in relationship with those who believe differently than we do. The third article of the *Creed* (“I believe in the Holy Spirit”) reminds us that God’s Holy Spirit can surprise us with peace and friendship where fear and suspicion once reigned, even if we do not believe in the same way.

Presently, there are very few opportunities for people who come from different faith traditions to share a common space and hear each other’s stories. Instead, our current political and cultural divisions drive us to mutual suspicions and stereotypes. We can do better. As Jesus teaches us in His *Sermon on the Mount*, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). Grace and hospitality are ways that Shepherd of the Hill can contribute to this peacemaking. Join us as we attempt to honor Jesus’ call to be different than the surrounding culture by being salt and light to world that really needs it.

In Jesus’ name,

Pastor Jon