MURDERED FOR HIS FAITH
2023-10-01 First UU Society of Burlington
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Invocation:
One piece of wood,
one piece of metal;
one open heart
another open heart.
They touch, they sing.
They sing a song
of harmony, love and piece.

Reading:
What is the goal of our gatherings?
To discover a human;
to get to know a human;
to awaken his or her faculties;
to find brotherly and human relationship with others.
We are humans.
We are humans, who have drawn up
a motto on our shield: Brotherhood.
— N.F. Čapek, personal diary

Murdered For His Faith

Norbert Fabián Čapek was the founding minister of the Prague church and the Czech Unitarian movement. You may know that the Flower Communion originated in the Prague church, and it was an idea of Čapek! Despite my disliking of any type of personality cults, I do admit that Čapek was a hero. I admire and respect his spiritual power and personal integrity, as well as his courage and devotion to an ideal.

Why? Why was Čapek a hero? It's because he ment what he was saying, because he acted as he preached, because he was not willing to compromise his belief, because he died for his faith. He was murdered by the Nazis during the Second World War. After the German army started the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and killing Jews, Gypsies and anyone who politically did not agree with their views, the Čapek's family left, together with hundreds of other families to avoid being killed. Čapek himself did not leave. He stayed because he did not want his church to be without their minister in those bad times.

Čapek liked to preach about freedom, human progress, and human dignity. He knew that Nazi spies attended each of his sermons and read all of the printed materials that were published by the Church. He tried to veil his messages with the Biblical parables and religious double-talk. The Nazis

knew what he was up to and were looking for a reason to get him. Finally, they found him listening to the British Broadcast Radio, and that was a good enough reason to accuse him of treason. The court acquitted him, but the Nazis insisted on their will: Čapek was sent to the concentration camp in Dachau, and in his papers was stated the fatal instruction: "return unwanted."

As his co-prisoners described after the end of the Second World War, Čapek continued in his ministry and spread his message of freedom, conscience, and fellowship of humanity in the concentration camp. He helped people to sing and hope, because singing and hoping are the best companions, even in the worst living conditions. The Nazi doctors used Čapek as a guinny pig, and finally killed him in Dachau in 1942.

That's why I see him as a hero: he did not compromise his faith and ideals! Where did he find the power? What made his faith strong? Let me talk briefly about his life.

Čapek was born in 1870 into a poor tailor's family in Bohemia. Bohemia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time; later on in 1918 it became part of Czechoslovakia, and today it is part of the Czech Republic. Čapek became Baptist when he was 17. Only a year later he already worked as a Baptist missionary in Slovakia. Slovakia was strongly Roman Catholic at that time, and the Baptist confession was very unusual to local patriots. Čapek's preaching was very popular, although his radical views often called for a scandal.

There is one story which illustrates well Čapek's reputation as a Christian revivalist. Once, after he delivered his sermon to a large crowd, a woman pushed her way to the pulpit. Someone asked her what she needed, and she said: "I want to see if he really has horns!"

So she looked at Čapek carefully and continued with a surprise: "Well, he does not have horns... But I still want to see if he has hooves." She was disappointed.

Later Čapek went to a Baptist seminary in Hamburg, Germany. After finishing his studies he served as a pastor in Germany and Moravia. In his sermons, Čapek preached against the Austro-Hungarian Empire; therefore his name appeared on the "black list." Čapek and his family decided to move to the US to avoid being put in prison.

In the United States Čapek served as a pastor in several Baptist churches. At that time, however, his long standing doubts about his religious affiliation culminated. He doubted the very theological foundations of his Christianity: the infallibility of the Bible; the puzzling theory of God's trinity; the Divinity of Jesus; and finally the effect of baptism which is central to the Baptists. His doubts let him finally in his leaving the Baptist Church. Later, as he reflected on where he belonged spiritually, he found the Unitarian Church and became a dedicated member.

In all those years of his life in the US Čapek missed his native country. In 1921, Čapek and his family moved back to Bohemia and started a unique project: a Unitarian religious revival movement.

Truly, Čapek was a religious revivalist. He could not be just a moderate believer; he was radical, and yes, he was a radical liberal thinker. In 1906, while he was still a Baptist minister, Čapek wrote in his journal a few words, which explain a lot about his ideals, desires, and intentions. And which also illustrate where his motivation for religious revival came from: "I feel that I have my biggest life

work still ahead. It has smoldered inside; and the fire has to spread somehow — and light others!" ... "[A society's] pleasure, peace and success — everything will depend on the right brotherhood in congregations. [We have] to make principles of brotherhood [real] in ordinary daily life in the 20th century! ... A religious congregation [has to be made] part of the public and national fabric. ... Congregations of brotherhood should become the same thing for a city as the conscience is for a human."

It is always difficult to summarize the core of great thinkers' thoughts. In order to do it, one has to neglect the background of their thoughts and circumstances of their lives. If I say that Čapek's message was the notion that people should live together in peace, and learn to love each other in communities organized for that reason, I am well aware of a certain naivete and oversimplification. Nevertheless, I have to say it: the ideal of human fellowship determined Čapek's thinking and work for the rest of his life. There is nothing new in this notion; there have been many who have proclaimed it; but still, we have trouble doing it.

I really like what Čapek says, that religious congregations should be woven into the public and national fabric. "A fellowship should be the same thing for a city as the conscience is for a human."

This notion is crucial for understanding Čapek's life and theology. The emphasis on fellowship and conscience were the core of Čapek's message. Conscience is of a great importance in our lives. Conscience holds up a mirror to us; in this mirror we can see our real face; in this mirror of our conscience the truth about our deeds is shown.

The society in which each of us lives has problems to solve and questions to answer. What is always needed is conscience. Like each of us, our society also needs a mirror in order to see its real face; our society needs something which would be a warning voice; which would prove — by its very existence — that certain meaningful activities do still exist; that life itself is meaningful.

Čapek made the emphasis on fellowship and conscience, their mutual connection, the core of Czech Unitarianism. He affirmed: "We Unitarians with our whole being and by all our principles want to grow upwards; therefore, we proclaim freedom first, and we learn by ourselves to co-exist in harmony as conscientious and free individuals. It is possible; it is needed; it is essential; it is the only way to the redemption of humankind. ... [This can be achieved] only if we live in freedom and if we have an opportunity to develop and apply our faculties."

For many people in my Church Čapek's thoughts have been a great help and encouragement. We know that if anything needs to be improved in our human situation, people themselves have to do it. It can be done only if we live in freedom and if we have the possibility to develop and apply our faculties.

Čapek suggests that religious congregations should be woven into the public and national fabric. Fellowships should become the same thing for a city as the conscience is for a human. Conscience is of a great importance in our lives. Conscience holds up a mirror to us; in this mirror we can see our real face; in this mirror of our conscience the truth about our deeds is shown.

Each of us and also our society as a whole needs a mirror in order to see our real face; we need something which would be a warning voice; which would prove — by its very existence — that

certain meaningful activities do still exist; that life itself is meaningful. Therefore, it is important to be together. Does it sound familiar to you?

I believe that the message of Czech Unitarians, which was kindled by N.F. Čapek, is basically identical with yours. I am just a passing by guest here; but I can see that here is the place to share your joys or concerns, to offer or ask for physical or spiritual support.

And, also, this is a place where ideas are generated. Based on your ideals, you are active in various ways in social justice; you help your community, and, from a global perspective, by helping your community you help the world. This certainly is a place where we the conscience is active by holding up a mirror. If for nothing else, this itself would be a reason for you to keep this fellowship.

May the Spirit of Life guide our steps.