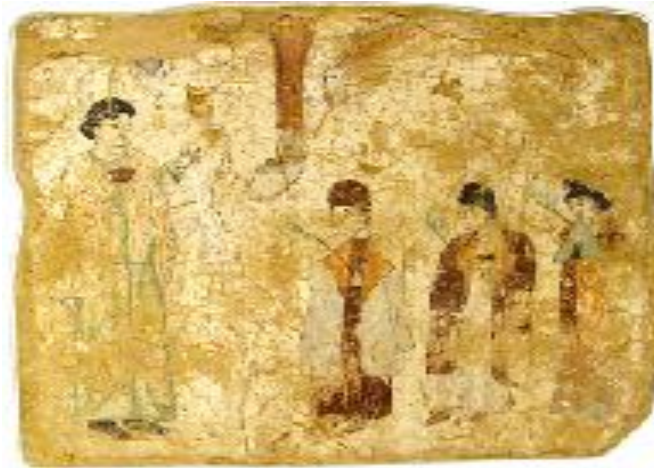


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, August 30, 2020

“Ye Su’s True Way in China, South Africa, and El Salvador”



Fifth, and last, in a five sermon series entitled:
“Many Perspectives: The *Other* Gospels”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Christian Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11



It is a real blessing to conclude our sermon series on extra-canonical scriptures entitled “Many Perspectives, The *Other* Gospels” with our sister churches in Guilford, West Brattleboro, West Dover, and Dummerston. I affirm that by worshipping together over the summer, we celebrate the diversity of

faith that exists even within a small geographical region and ecclesiastical tradition.

Sample of Early Christian Gospels	
• Canonical Gospels	
— Matthew	— Luke
— Mark	— John
• Extracanonical Gospels	
— Gospel of Thomas	— Infancy Gospel of Thomas
— Gospel of Peter	— Gospel of Mary
— Gospel of Judas	— Gospel of Judas

We began our August series by looking at the Gospel of Judas and considered the possibility that Judas actually *obeyed* rather than *betrayed* Jesus. With Mary Magdalene's gospel, we questioned why all of Jesus' disciples and the apostles were male when *women* primarily bankrolled, followed, and most clearly understood Jesus' ministry. In Thomas' gospel, we learned that we need to ensure the Spirit within us is divine and grounded before we seek to reform a sin-sick world. Last week, James' gospel encouraged us to be in prayer discern God's purpose, God's call, for our lives.¹ Today, seventh century Chinese sutras reveal to us that the Christian gospel emanating from the Ancient Near East conveys universal spiritual meaning if contextualized to local cultures and languages.

¹ This message was brought to us by Matt Deen.



In 635 C.E., East Syrian monks reached the capital of China's T'ang dynasty and received a favourable reception from its emperor. For about one-hundred and fifty years, Christianity spread in medieval China despite struggles. Dating back to 638 C.E., the 'Sutra of Jesus Christ' retells the message of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John in a language that would have been accessible to a Buddhist and Taoist audience.



This morning I invite you to hear, as would a seventh century Chinese Christian, excerpts from the fifth chapter of the fourth Sutra of Jesus Christ:
“(1) So God caused the *Cool Breeze* to come upon a chosen young woman called Mo Yan, who had no husband, and she became pregnant [...]



(4) Mo Yan gave birth to a boy and called him *Ye Su*, who is the Messiah and whose father is the Cool Breeze [...] (8) When *Ye Su* the Messiah was born, the whole world saw a bright mystery in the Heavens [...] (13) When he was twelve he assumed the Holy Word and began teaching [...]



(19) When he emerged from the waters the Cool Breeze visited him from Heaven and a voice proclaimed “This is my son, obey him” [...] (20) The Messiah showed everyone that the way of God is the way of Heaven [...] (23-27) He found people who were living evil lives and brought them back to the way of goodness, the *True Way*.



He instructed his followers, especially his twelve disciples, and travelled the land teaching and healing. Those departed from this world were restored to life. The blind were able to see. The cripple and sick were restored and able to walk [...] (41-43) The Messiah gave up his body to the wicked ones for the sake of all living beings. Through this the whole world knows that all life is as precious as a candle flame. In his compassion he gave up his life. (49-52) Those who saw this believed and he was who he said he was. How can anyone not believe? Those who take these words to heart are true disciples of the Messiah. As a result [...]”.² Here the text breaks-off.

Yes, the text breaks-off! This gives me the opportunity to finish it. “As a result...”,

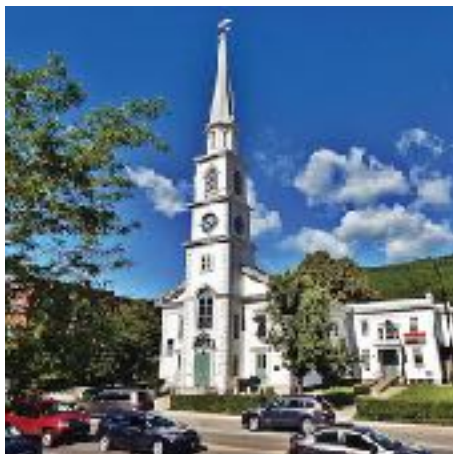
² *Readings in World Christian History: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Vol. I), editors John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, “Chinese Christian Sutras”, “The Fourth Sutra: The Sutra of Jesus Christ” (chapter five) in “Early Medieval Christianity in Asia” (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 2018), pp 243-251.



Philip brought the gospel to Africa through an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Thomas brought the gospel to India. Paul brought the gospel to Rome and thus to the western world. East Syrian monks travelled to China and spread the gospel.



The Spanish brought the Catholic gospel to South America, sadly, often with and by the sword and disease. Congregationalists brought the Protestant gospel to North America, though like the Spanish in the form of mercenary invaders rather than servant missionaries.



And here we are!



Friends, the Chinese sutras tell the same story of Jesus as our scripture does from Philippians: “And being found as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death [...] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and that every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God, the [Cool Breeze]” (2:8, 10-11).

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to you at home, the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.

Before we pray, I would like to introduce you to two ministries – one South Africa and one in El Salvador.



Representing a vital Christian ministry in South Africa is Judy Tate, Executive Director of Inanda Seminary where I lived and worked for almost twenty years.



Representing a vital Christian ministry in El Salvador is Tori Svec who will share with us about *Christo Redentor*. After hearing about both these ministries, I pray you will commit yourselves to contributing to their work. Below, I have provided to all the churches a hyperlink so that through Global Ministries your offering can be designated to directly support them.

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Please consider donating generously to one or both ministries through our wider church (UCC) instrumentality, Global Ministries. You can make a designated gift through the following website: [https://
donate.globalministries.org/onlinegiving](https://donate.globalministries.org/onlinegiving)

Please be sure to specifically designate by name in the field offered your offering to these two ministries. Thank you for your generosity.

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Let us as people of faith in Vermont be servants of the church, followers of Ye Su's True Way in our homes, in our state, in our country, and throughout the world.