

## **On Behalf of Rabbi Leo Trepp – A Missing Voice**

Good Evening.

My name is Hank Knight, Director of the Cohen Center at KSC. My responsibility tonight was to provide a brief introduction of our guest, Rabbi Dr. Leo Trepp. However, due to unexpected illness, Rabbi Trepp is not able to be with us. He had a stroke over the weekend and is in the care of doctors and friends in New York City where we hope he is resting comfortably. Even though his wife has informed us that his stroke was mild, we do know that it has affected his speech, intensifying the sense of his absent voice tonight.

As we have explained in our publicity for the evening, we believe that Rabbi Trepp is the last surviving rabbinical witness to Kristallnacht. He was ordained Rabbi of the State of Oldenberg in Northern Germany in 1936 and was arrested during the 1938 pogrom of Kristallnacht. He was then transported to Sachsenhausen Concentration camp where he was held until the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain intervened to secure his release to leave Germany. Joined by his brother, he made his way to England and then the United States where he began life anew, eventually serving congregations in Massachusetts, Washington state, and California. In addition, he somehow found time to teach philosophy at Napa College for over thirty years while helping establish and build a number of new congregations in central California.

I would be remiss not to tell you that in his long and distinguished rabbinical career he also found his way back to Germany where he taught courses in Judaism at the University of Mainz as well as the Universities of Frankfurt, Berlin, and Oldenburg, lecturing widely in other German universities as well.

As you can tell from this brief and partial identification of his accomplishments, Dr. Trepp is a special treasure and a beloved figure in the lives of many, many people. And even though he cannot be with us tonight, he can be a treasure for us as well.

Dr. Trepp's absence provides us with an opportunity to accept responsibility for transmitting his story on his behalf. Indeed, it may serve as an unexpected articulation of the vocation subsequent generations have in relationship to the survivor generation. Their witness depends upon our attentive care, learning their stories and then transmitting them with humility and understanding. In the end, we know we can only convey a part of what the survivor generation knows. But the part we can convey is the part that calls us to responsibility to those who have gone before us, and who pass on to us responsibility for the world we share with each other.

Elie Wiesel, in *Town Beyond the Wall*, talks about this relationship as a chain of memory. As witnesses to life as well as to its tragic denial, survivors tell their stories to others and in so doing pass on their names, their identities and stories, to the persons who choose to listen and learn. Then each of them tells the story told to them, passing on the name and story to another, and another. When we participate in that chain of memory, we give voice and life to those who entrust their stories to us as we pass them along, faithful to what we have heard and to those who have reached out to us. And in so doing, we resist those attempts to silence and remove their presence from our lives.

Dr. Trepp's absence tonight is an occasion where we can take responsibility for his story – at least that part we know, and for recognizing that there is much more we cannot know. In that way, our voices can become partner voices with and for him expressing what he can only express now with our help. That is the gift we can offer him this evening as we wish him well.

However, as important as that gift is, it is incomplete without another – taking responsibility for our community by recommitting ourselves to listening to the stories and voices of others in our own community who need our voices and our care for their lives to be whole. Sometimes, that is because they have been hurt or wounded and need someone to understand and challenge the indifference in their midst with compassionate engagement. Sometimes that will be because we want to act to make sure indifference is not the character of our life together – whether in Keene or any other community in our region. We give Dr. Trepp and any who have known the violation of their world hope when we take responsibility for shaping a life together in which respect and justice are enabled to thrive. That is especially significant for us as we gather here in this place, one of eight downtown businesses that was burglarized just several weeks ago during an annual community event. What happened to those eight businesses happened to the entire town. It wounded us all, but it can also bind us together stronger than before. It all depends on who we choose to be.

Dr. Trepp, we will not be silent without you. That, we promise you. Instead, we will act and speak on your behalf – as far we are able – and always, on behalf of one another. Dr. Trepp, we miss you. We wish you well. And we hope, in some measure, that we honor you tonight in our gathering here.