

Dzieci: A Passion According to Matthew
An appraisal by Pastor Daniel Meeter 4/17/14

This past Holy Week we hosted Theatre Group Dzieci's new production of A Passion According to Matthew, and I was moved and thrilled.

What did I like so much? The use of Jewish vocabulary. The choice for shtetl Jewish costumes instead of ancient ones, which made the event more worshipful. The evangelist's voice moving from person to person, along with the character of Jesus. The breaking and sharing of the bread and wine with the audience. The music. The Mourner's Kaddish said for Jesus. The wonderfully understated physical acting; choreographed like a long, involved dance: a ritual, a liturgy indeed.

The characters broke the conventions. Neither Judas nor Pilate were monsters. The disciples were not fools, even for being occasionally comic. And the simple device of moving the character of Jesus among the players spared us the problem of one actor trying to play this most impossible role.

The main character, indeed, was the troupe, inhabiting all the other characters and the story as a whole. This allowed the troupe to be simultaneously our evangelist and our collective priest, taking us into the narrative but also into the ritual and liturgy inherent in the story.

I have followed Dzieci since I first saw *The Devils of Loudon* in 2003. I have seen the *Fools Mass* several times, as well as *Makbet*. This Passion incorporates, of course, so many of the troupe's distinctives, but it also has a lyrical softness that we haven't seen before, a sheen, a shimmer. The story unfolds and opens up like a prayer shawl and gathers us in and holds us lightly for a while, making its own space with us in it, until the story reaches its sad end and lets us go again, but with music and a simple dance.

We have already scheduled A Passion for next year's Holy Week. It's going to continue to be our Worship Service for Holy Thursday.

Daniel Meeter is pastor of the "Old First" Reformed Church in Prospect Park
A Passion will take place at Old First Reformed Church on Thursday, April 18th