Kristallnacht - "Night of Broken Glass" 9-10 November 1938. A Brief Remembrance

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A text prepared by the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). It may be appropriate for inclusion in a liturgy or other form of remembrance of Kristallnacht.

KRISTALLNACHT

*"Night of Broken Glass" **

9-10 November 1938

For the Jews of Germany in 1938, Kristallnacht will always be a memory of horror and fear. Triggered by the assassination of a German official at the embassy in Paris, the systematic violence (“pogrom”) launched against Jewish persons and property throughout the Third Reich on that night was unprecedented in its extent. In the summary of historian S. Ettinger, “hundreds of synagogues were burned down; some 7,500 Jewish shops and businesses were destroyed, and the number of dead totaled ninety. Immediately afterwards there commenced a series of mass arrests: 26,000 Jews, mainly well-to-do, were placed in concentration camps, and hundreds of them died as a result of brutal treatment by the SS.”

We light candles to remember the dead, to transform the fire of destruction into the fire of memory.

For people who learn of *Kristallnacht*, 9-10 November of any year is a time to remember and reflect. Several million neighbors of the Jews, synagogues, and Jewish businesses that fell victim to the violence stood by - if they were not participants in the destruction. Lulled into a false morality that relegated Jews to second-class status, these “good citizens” were ill equipped to defend their neighbors by honoring the ideals of freedom, dignity, and equality on which modern culture was erected. They had forgotten the struggles of years gone by; they had forgotten the essentials of their own heritage; they had forgotten what it was to be oppressed themselves and to feel the boot of the oppressor on their neck. In their forgetting, they became impotent as defenders and complicit in the violence.

We light candles to remember who we are, to kindle in our hands the passion for human solidarity that burns in our hearts, to bring to action the urge for justice that warms our best selves.

The Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College

* Note: the following was prepared by the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). It may be appropriate for inclusion in a liturgy or other form of remembrance of Kristallnacht. Please give acknowledgment to the Institute.

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