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**Church of the Beatitudes United Church of Christ**

Living the Life, Living Green

*A Sermon by*

Rev. Dr. Theodore Elsenheimer & NYE Youth

Scripture: Psalm 24:1-6; John 1:1-4

August 3, 2008

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🎵 God is still speaking,

**Pastor Ted:**

We were certainly living the life just a few days ago in Knoxville, Tennessee. You may not remember this, but 50 years ago in Cleveland two denominations, the Congregational Christians and the Evangelical Reformed Church, met and became the United Church of Christ. That coming summer, the year of our first National Youth Event, there were 500 young people from across the United Church of Christ that met from the Pilgrim Fellowship and the Youth Fellowships of the two denominations. They met for the first time at Riverside Church where Reverend Tom Stiers is senior pastor today.

Those 500 youth set up a celebration process that has happened every four years since. This year as we gathered with our over 3,000 brothers and sisters, we were able to reflect upon some of those pieces. Some of the parts that we did were silly, some of them playful. I have to tell you that I enjoyed my afternoon playing volleyball for three hours. About fifteen minutes after that, I could not stand up. I thought I was younger than I, in fact, was.

On the Sunday before we left, we prayed here and commissioned these young people; 11 from our church, 16 of us in total, as we were going to the National Youth Event. That same day the Reverend Steve Sterner from Cleveland offered to the congregation the denomination of the United Church of Christ, that each congregation pray for these young people, leaders, and speakers that we might have a fantastic time and be safe and protected from the universe around us.

I mention this only because it was a fantastic event, and I wish to say thank you to all of you who prayed for us. You cannot think about this National Youth Event, if you were there, without thinking about the Unitarian Universalist Church, which was less than a mile away from our doors, where, on our last day as we were gathering, there was an announcement that came across that a gunman went into a children's program in a Unitarian Universalist Church and because they were liberal, because they supported gay and lesbian people, because they were a socially progressive church, this man chose to go in and shoot eight people less than one mile from our doors. They could easily have tried, at least, to come into our auditorium with 3,000 of our children. This church would be an obvious target to that same kind of person. I want you to know that as we were in worship, we prayed for the Unitarian Universalist Church in total for that particular congregation but for all people who are, from time to time, labeled with titles that allow others to be targets. Let us remember this morning, as we go through these next words, to remember that God is still speaking but clearly sometimes not all the people are listening. Listen to these words shared about Da Moose.

**Faith Mellott & Emmery:**

Good morning. I'm Faith and this is Emmery. We went to NYE and everyone gets like five classes that they get to go to, workshops, and there can be from five people in your class to a thousand people in your class. So it's a really fun learning experience. Emmery and I were both signed up for sacred stories. We didn't really know what it was about, but one of the ministers there was our teacher. She said, "Does anyone go to camp?" Emmery and I both raised our hands, and there were a thousand people there, so everyone raised their hands. She said, "Do you

guys sing camp songs?” And everyone is like “Yeah, we do.” Emmery and I especially have one favorite camp song, and it’s called Da Moose. We want to teach it to you. Can everyone stand up?

(Da Moose song)

**Samuel Mellott:**

Good morning. My name is Samuel. I’m the largest member of your youth program here at Beatitudes. We went to National Youth Event, and besides all the craziness—I mean, if you would have seen the video, you probably would have gotten the wrong idea. There were activities, there were niceties, a swimming pool, fun stuff like that, but there really was something to gather from these incredibly intelligent people that spoke to us. One of them was Eboo Patel. I don’t know if anybody has ever heard of him; he’s written multiple books. I’m not sure how many doctorates he has, but he is, in fact, a doctor of some fields. He’s the religious advisor for the United States Religious Council. He is an Arab Muslim. He promotes interfaith cooperation. That’s his whole spiel is he thinks that most conflicts that are unresolved in this world, like over oil, invasions, are the cause of religion. And he’s kind of right. Civil wars, people killing each other, tribal conflicts in Africa, all kinds of things are really based on religion. He promotes interfaith cooperation. One of the things he started is an interfaith youth corp. He’s trying to relate to our generation as the first interfaith generation. Fifty years ago asking a Christian if he knew a Muslim was insane. That’s what I’m told. I wasn’t there. Apparently it was out of the question. I know many different people from many different backgrounds. I have the pleasure of being part of the most technologically connected generation. My generation has been in contact for our entire lifetime. Everyone has been talking, the Internet, things like that. He really wants us to focus on religious acceptance, getting over the fact that we may have differences of opinion and really focus on faith, and the fact that we have faith and not religion, the fact that everyone looks to a god and not necessarily what your god looks like, what your god is called and just getting along. It really changed my life, honestly. National Youth Event was an amazing experience. I don’t think it would have been the same if I hadn’t heard Eboo talk. If I hadn’t heard a few people talk, I don’t think it would have been the same experience. Really a great thing. That’s all I have to say. Thank you.

**Pastor Ted:**

At the event we had Spencer Leiby, Savannah and Lacey Millsap, Gina Minichiello, Natasha Low, Will Senn, Faith, Ann, and Sam Mellott along with Michele and myself.

When you think about where the world has been over the last 40, 50 years, it’s an amazing thing. When I was in my teens, like most of these young people, actually all, I thought I could make a better world. I really believed it. As we were in worship, one of the things that our five national leaders of the UCC seemed to say was, “We believed that when we came into our majority years, but is the world any better than it was 30, 40, 50 years ago?” In some ways I can actually say no, it’s maybe even worse. Maybe not, but at least as bad. On the closing worship, as our four worship leaders were standing there offering communion, one of the things that really changed was they began to experience something that I can only tell you is when you watch them. They

started very solid, and about halfway through the communion service, Steve Sterner, who was actually speaking at the moment, the youth had written a script that he was supposed to offer. In the middle of the script it became obvious that they were not Steve's words. He started to belly laugh. I don't know how many of you know Steve, but Steve is not somebody who just cracks up publicly very often. In the course of his phrases, he turned to the youth in the middle of the sacrament and said, "You bring me hope."

It has been a tough 40, 50 years. But we, as Sam was just saying, have hope that there is a way for us to establish justice, a sense of openness, respect for each other. When we had communion, behind us, behind the worship leaders, there came a slide where the youth had taken what is University of Tennessee's bulletin board, it's a huge boulder that anybody at the campus can write on. It had had a wedding announcement just the day before. The kids that morning had taken whitewash paint, painted the entire boulder and on it they had put, and excuse me if I don't get it exactly right, but "We are praying for you Unitarian Universalists." Below it said, "Youth of NYE." It had a black comma on it. In the middle of that moment the worship leaders, not knowing what had gone on, turned around and saw this slide put on the large screen behind them. The entire room was quiet.

In the broken bread, in the broken bodies, in the brokenness of our world, the youth of the NYE, through their God, found a voice. They are still speaking and there is incredible hope in living the life. It's not all over yet. In Christ all things are made new. Let us continue to live the life by God's grace.