

---

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

Explain This “Trinity” To Me

*A Sermon by*

Rev. Dr. Nancy Nelson Elsenheimer

Scripture: John 15:26 - 16:7

May 30, 2010

Every month I write a reflection for our Grapevine newsletter. Hopefully you receive it by e-mail, or the old fashioned way, by snail mail. Hopefully you read it, not just my reflection or my article, but the many events and activities of Church of the Beatitudes, of our service to the community and to the world, of our plans for the future. Barbara Wood does a wonderful job of communicating our vision: a church alive, a church reaching in and reaching out, a church being and doing what a church is and does.

Sometimes I get feedback about my articles. It is nice to know a few people read them anyway. The most talked about article was about a year ago when I wrote that I had been summoned to jury duty. If you are ever at a party and need a line to get a conversation started, just tell people “I was just summoned to report for jury duty” and look out. The stories are amazing, and people have definite opinions about jury duty. I was excused that time, my jury group number was not called. But just before I left for Nicaragua in April of this year, I got a notice from the US District Court calling me to jury duty for the Monday when I returned from 10 days in Nicaragua. How fun would that be? Ted called in for me on Friday, and I was excused for Monday, but yes, I did have to report on Tuesday.

So here is the drill: You go to downtown Phoenix, to the beautiful Sandra Day O'Connor Office building. You report in, they give you donuts, and you wait. Our group of 50 potential jurors was eventually taken upstairs to the courtroom for our *voir dire*, our questioning about our backgrounds and our potential biases and/or hardships before being chosen to sit on a jury. It was to be a criminal case, drug trafficking, firearms violations, and money laundering. It would likely last four to five days in trial, the Accused against the United States of America. The judge asked us, “Can you be open and fair and afford this person a fair trial, innocent until proven guilty?” Some potential jurors spoke up, “I don't think I could be fair. I have adopted a child from a drug addicted family and I know firsthand the bad effects of drugs. I don't think I could be fair.” “It would be a hardship for me. I am self-employed, or I work the night shift, or I am a pastor and I have three funerals coming up, or I am the sole support in my household, or I don't speak the language well enough to understand what is going on.” The judge listened gently and carefully to us, and I am sure he has heard it all before. He quietly reminded us in any circumstance, would we not use our common sense? Would we not make some room in our minds and our hearts and our schedules for a shot at justice being done? Would we not be an Advocate, one Merriam Webster calls ‘a summoned voice’, ‘one that supports or promotes the interest of another’?

Now, I am not interested in supporting a drug trafficking, money laundering, armed kingpin of a drug trade. But, I am interested in building a society and families that are drug free, families who can earn an income to support their families legally, who don't buy drugs or weapons in the first place, a society, I know this sounds crazy, that believes, where no matter who you are or where you are on life's journey you are welcome here.

The judge in the big black robe was calling us, 50 potential jurors, to his passion: justice, just as I too sometimes gently, sometimes crudely and rudely, share my passion with you, from this pulpit or from my meetings or my Grapevine articles: justice.

I went back and looked at my March 2009 article where I shared a quote from my Old Testament professor Dr. Walter Brueggemann: “Justice is finding out what belongs to whom, and giving it back to them.”

I believe, for the Church and for this church: Justice is giving people back their dignity. Justice is giving people back their hope. Justice is giving people back their worth. Justice is giving people back the fullness of their identity. Justice is giving people back their path to God. Justice is our being called to be ‘a summoned voice’, an Advocate, that supports and promotes the interest of another.

Jesus was not around to say those words of our text today in John, Chapter 15. Those words were words of the community of faith that had gathered. Some scholars think the words of John’s Gospel were written from a community of faith in Ephesus, Turkey, a learned, multicultural, multiracial city that was under the hand of Roman occupiers. Was it possible that these words were written when John’s community was ‘transitioning from being a band of Jesus’ followers to being a community with its own responsibility to witness to all that Jesus had been?’<sup>1</sup> These church members of John’s time were now the ones who were saying, “We believe in God. We believe in Jesus who taught us new ways to live. We believe in the Spirit that though this Jesus the man died, his legacy, his teachings, his Spirit, his Advocate, his summoning voice is with us still.” They were saying, “We will not give up the fight for justice. We will not call the Roman Emperor ruler of the Universe, God and Lord of all creation. We will be the voice for the voiceless, the hope for the hopeless, the generous love for those who are trampled over...we will be the love of God made visible in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

This is Trinity Sunday, the day when we accept the call to be the summoned voice, the Advocate. My question to you is how will you accept the call to be the summoned voice, the Advocate? How will this community of faith accept the call to be the summoned voice, the Advocate?

There is really no right answer to those questions. There is no one right way. Each one of us has to answer for ourselves, and together, as a church, we have to answer that call. Without any answer, we are a club or a clan, a corporation or a company, a follow-the-charismatic-leader, rather than a church, an incarnational, transformational community.<sup>3</sup>

Friday and Saturday of this week it was my turn to answer the call to be an advocate by meeting with other clergy and leaders of the United Church of Christ in worship and then joining thousands of others in the immigration march beginning at Steele Indian School Park, headed toward the Capitol. It reminded me of the days of civil rights, which I was actually too young for but which I know others in this church marched for. Who today would say it was right to ask some people to sit in the back of the bus? It reminded me of the times I did march for the rights of women and the rights of prisoners unjustly sentenced, and the rights of the LGBT community, and the rights for people to marry.

To be an immigrant is to be a person trying to find a way to make a home, and if you look very far into immigration laws and practices, you have to know that what we have now is broken. Ask our teachers. Ask our hospitals. Ask our social workers. Ask our nurses. Ask our police officers. Ask our children.

I want to be an advocate, a summoned voice, for safe schools and safe communities and safe streets, for all the people. How do we put our voices together and work together and not polarize, but listen

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkPent.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=5/31/2009&tab=4](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=5/31/2009&tab=4)

<sup>3</sup> Kirk Hadaway, *Behold I Do A New Thing*, Pilgrim Press, 2001.

and be heard? Shall I remind you of our Wednesday night town hall, with Dr. Lattie Corr, asking us all how do we build the kind of Arizona we want?

Last Wednesday night we had a delightful time of sharing when members of congregation told their stories of how they had served their country and humanity through active duty service. Thank you all, this Memorial Day, for your service. Thank you for reminding me that others did not come back; they died for their service. Thank you for reminding me that war and conflict is not all that it is cracked up to be. Several of the speakers said they served because they got a free education or a job through their service and many times wondered what they were doing there, wherever they were stationed. Thank you for reminding me that we need to share our stories and we have people in this congregation who did their service through the Peace Corps and through Americorps and through Teach for America, and through being a missionary. I hope we can have a time to hear their stories, their patriotism and love of country too.

Will you share your story? Will you share your joys and your struggles of how you have found your summoned voice, or how you are still trying to find that voice? What does God want you to be and do with your life? What does God want this church to be and do? What is God calling us to be and do now and into the future? With all the gifts we have, with all the resources we have, endowed and in our own pockets, what are we being called to give, to share, to sacrifice, to be generous?

The Holy Spirit came on Pentecost last week through our children and their fabulous musical. And the Holy Spirit came long ago, not to be just a wind that blows through once a year, as predictable as the monsoons in Arizona. The Spirit of Pentecost blew in the Advocate, the summoned voice, into a scared community of faith in Ephesus, saying, “Don’t be scared. You may not see me any longer, but I will not leave you alone. I have not left you alone. I will never leave you alone. I will be like a comforter to you. I will be like a thorn in your side always asking the hard questions. I will be patient. I will be restless. I will be with you like still waters and I will trouble the waters. I will never leave you. So you, my disciples, my followers, my believers, my summoned voices, go and bear fruit. Sow the seed. Remind others and yourselves that death always rises to new life. What matters is life and love. Be that life and love.”

April 28<sup>th</sup>, I was excused from this round of jury duty. I was not chosen to be among the 12, plus alternates. The un-chosen went downstairs. We waited in case the court needed us. We waited in jury purgatory. When the floor cleaners came at 4:30, we were finally let go. “Thank you for your service. Your check is in the mail.”

Am I disappointed? Not really, because I feel like I have another place where I can do justice: Here. With you. And others. Amen.