

**Center Church, Guest Speaker on GHIAA/Social Justice (10-11-20)** Derrick Alan Everett, Organizer for GHIAA

**Greetings and good morning**, here and online. Warm thanks to Reverend Stackhouse, who's gracious invitation brought me here to speak with you today. Again, my name is Derrick Alan Everett, and I am here on behalf of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, better known as GHIAA.

**For today's message**, I selected the passage on "Moses and the Seventy Elders" found in Numbers 11, verses 16-29. This passage contains a core learning we offer to clergy on the wisdom of sharing one's leadership burden with lay leaders and leadership from the congregation. We take time to explore how even well intentioned attempts by clergy leaders to "hold on to this spirit" just for themselves often proves fruitless, leading to more and different frustrations and complications and disappointments. And we spend the bulk and remainder of the time in a shared, imaginative leap of faith: What if clergy issued the call to share their burdens, and leaders came? What might be possible with such a movement of the spirit?

**Usually**, we talk about "the HOW" of this: "how" relational community is rooted in one-to-one relationships; "how" a deep relational culture leads to an enlivening of the church and community; "how" a church and community who truly know one another come to stand up for and support one another in times of need; "how" much joy and love there is in living within such community. We usually talk about "how" this happens.

**Today**, I want to testify, not so much as to the how, as much as to my own spiritual "WHY"; why, as an Organizer who works for members of GHIAA like you, I do this; why I see faith as "the seeking of justice". I want to talk about "**Need, Resolved Through Faith.**"

**As a young boy growing up in the church in the South**, I was raised on parallel biblical stories of Moses organizing and leading his people out of the hands of their oppressors on one hand, and on civil rights stories of Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others once again organizing and leading their people out of oppression.

**Early on**, I sensed I was at once both a Child of Moses and a Child of Ella. I have been shown that which is good and in right relationship with a God of Abiding Love, and I understand my charge to be to do Justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Each day that I seek justice, I demonstrate my faith in God, through Jesus Christ, that the Holy Spirit is far from absent - even in times like these. Yes, even in times like these, the Holy Spirit is here. For me, my calling was clear: the greatest offering I could give God as a testament that my faith is true - is to live my life as if I believe in God's covenant with me so that when my life's journey has ended, I would have lived my life in right relationship with God. In fact, it is in each of us, an invitation from God waiting to be accepted, and a covenant that not only affords us Grace - it commands us to it.

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**As members of the living community of faith**, we know that God's grace is not cheap. The cost of grace is impossible to account for in our minds and hearts - infinitely high.... And yet, through the love of God and the blood of Jesus Christ, Grace has been made "incarnately" affordable. When asked for the highest commandment, Jesus, in **Luke 10:27** provides some clarity: *First*, Love God with all that you are, and have been, and might someday become; then - *Second* - love your neighbor as yourself. It's all about relationships.

**In this way**, justice (or righteousness, if you will) begins by seeking to be in "right relationship" with God, with ourselves, with one another. And all of these relationships can be made "right" through love, through seeing and recognizing the Holy Spirit in one another, that the person

next to you, in front of you is worthy, is capable of the miraculous, just as worthy as you are, flaws and all. That there exists no distance in all of existence too far or wide to escape the cover of Grace and Unfailing Love given to us by God.

**In the passage from Numbers 11** for consideration today, we see God's unfailing love - even if this love comes with additional lessons.

**We see a God the Father**, who provides "manna" to meet our daily needs, even when we see a people complaining out of envy, a people who have failed to fully hold up their end of the covenant. God's lesson offers hard reminders for those of us who hope to remain under God's cover of protection but force ourselves away from that cover by moving out of right relationship with God and with one another.

**We see a God who moves by and through the Holy Spirit** to make miracles happen, even when we may not yet understand the "how" or the "why" of it. Our purpose remains to be in right relationship with God, so that should our call come to enter the Tent of the Presence, we are ready to accept the Holy Spirit and perform miracles.

**When faced with chaos and dangers all around him**, compounded by disunity and lack of discipline in faith from those within the community, Moses reached a breaking point. God's response is telling: 'Bring me 70 of the elders of Israel, leaders among the people. Bring them to the Tent of the Presence. Take your stand together, and I will come and share the spirit given to you with your 70 elders, so that they may be empowered to share your burden. In this way, you will not bear the burden of leadership alone.'

**Growing up**, I heard stories of the miracle-workers of the Civil Rights Movement. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to hurt them, would aim violent torrents of water from fire hoses while unleashing snarling German Shepherds to bite and hurt and kill. I couldn't understand why anyone would beat, bomb, baton and set ablaze their "neighbor".

**Over time**, I came to understand that my heroes were doing the hard part of Micah 6:8, that we are each commanded with understanding right and wrong and are called to act in the name of justice. We may not be called in the same way, but our call will come, and we must each be ready. Many will be recognized in the Tent of the Presence, for the work there is important work being done inside the four walls of worship. And still others - others like **Eldad** and **Medad** will hear the call where they are, in the camps tending to the community, seeking justice outside the four walls of worship.

**As I look around today**, as I watch news clips shared from allies across the nation, I **still** can't truly understand it. Fire hoses have been replaced with tasers, while the batons and bullets remain. With each passing day, new danger emerges. Truth be told, 2020 has been a doozy!

**I imagine the boy** who approached Moses faced a little bit of this. He was living in his own "times like this", with chaos reigning all around, with oppressors on their heels, with disease-ravaged food supplies, with arrows streaming left and right... and with losses and death and hurt all around. For that young boy, that young Believer, I imagine what must have been going through his mind and heart. He wanted to play his part. He wanted to share the burden. He wanted Moses to know he had his back!

**The comfort given that boy** by Moses' response is the same one I take and offer to you: when told of the prophesying by the church elders, Moses responded by saying: "**Are you afraid the people will think I am not the leader now? I wish that all the LORD's people were able to prophesy. I wish that the LORD would put his Spirit on all of them!**".

**Today, in this place, you are my comfort**, for you - the members of Center Church - have gathered as God commanded beneath this tent - both the Meeting House here and the digital away stations of our online viewers.

**In times like these**, where breath is a blessing, my comfort comes in knowing that - as a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, you and Center Church are already part of an incredible effort to make real the call of the tent of the Presence: the establishment and promotion of right relationship between all under God's over of Grace and Love, and the transformation of unjust systems, structures, and institutions.

**In times like these**, where breath is a blessing, our lives are proof-positive of how need can be resolved through faith; how hurt can be healed by love; how loss can be <sup>3</sup> supported by community; how anger - a righteous and abiding fire of love, born out of the experience of loss and stoked and enlivened by the winds of justice; and how this anger can be used and, indeed, transformed by the Holy Spirit into miracles of our day. Though my breath, my voice may be just one, together - if touched by the Holy Spirit, we might one day soon herald great winds of justice in Hartford.

**As you go about your week**, consider your place among the leaders inside **and** outside the four walls of Center Church. Seek out one another in relational community so that you may be ready to respond to the needs of one another and act together in justice.

**GHIAA** is a resource and community of which you are already a part. Within GHIAA, there is a deliberate, interfaith effort to cross lines of race, class, geography, and other differences for the purpose of building a relational community in right relationship with one another and with God. We do this to be response-able - and thus ready to respond to social justice issues facing our communities, while helping our congregations come alive. Our present slate of cut and endorsed issues include: criminal justice, education, housing, health care, and gun safety, and several COVID-crisis responses that all come as a commitment to anti-racism organization-wide.

**To learn more about GHIAA**, please let Reverend Stackhouse know. I would be happy to meet with you to share more and discuss how we might live in faith by seeking justice together.  
**Thank you.**