



# TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*on the Branford Green*

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

## **Not For The Faint-hearted**

**By The Rev. Sharon Gracen**

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On September 9, 1980, six men and two women broke into the General Electric nuclear missile facility in King of Prussia, PA. Three were priests, one was a nun, one a former marine. They brought hammers, with which they beat on the nuclear warhead nose cones that were made there in a symbolic attempt to beat weapons into plows. They also poured their own blood onto records and order forms. They were all arrested and charged with ten different felonies and misdemeanor counts. They all spent time in prison. They all did it again.

Prior to their first act of resistance, they had been meeting and praying for months, trying to discern appropriate action in response to their call to be instruments of peace and what they would call their action. They were motivated by the conviction that nuclear weapons were the ultimate perversion of human violence. What they did became known as the Plowshares movement. Since then, there have been actions like the one in King of Prussia, PA all over the world, nearly 100 of them.

Two of the priests were the brothers Berrigan, Daniel and Phillip. Phillip, the younger, had already been involved in anti-war protests, targeting a draft board during the Viet Nam war. His prison sentence for that action turned his older brother into a peace warrior. Before he died of cancer, Phillip Berrigan had spent a total of 11 years in prison for his refusal to ignore the call to be a peacemaker in a warring world. He was nominated six times for a Nobel Peace Prize. He was also on the FBI's Most Wanted List.

Daniel Berrigan, who is now 92, is a transcendent, annoying example of the Gospel. Transcendent because he stays in a frequency of love, always sees the world as it might be. Annoying, because his commitment to the gospel challenges us, especially when we play it safe. The clarity with which he lives, and his priorities, offers a tough standard for our own. He taught at places like Cornell, Yale and still at Fordham. He is the author of over 50 books of award winning poetry and prose. As you might expect, his writing reflects the passion of his life - God, justice and peace. His autobiography is called *To Dwell in Peace*.

He is the author of a wonderful book called *Isaiah; Spirit of Courage, Gift of Tears*. His inner poet is at full voice as he writes about today's reading. In his unquenchable mode of challenge, he has interpreted the servant as a she. Listen to how he describes this mysterious figure.



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*Comes now my servant; look how I upbear her,  
this chosen one, in whom my soul delights!  
Her spirit outpoured, my justice her own!  
Her mind no proving ground, whence vexing thoughts bestir,  
how gently she walks the earth!  
small creatures safe and sound, unharmed close, cherished.  
her soul borne on high an unextinguished flame routing the dark.  
Faithful, unconquerable -- the ends of the earth hearken,  
lauding that word of truth, her, my own!*

This servant has been chosen of God to be a sign that all are chosen. Berrigan says that "In classical Jewish commentary, the Servant Song was understood as a celebration of God's choice of a community...If Jews were chosen, it was in order to offer a sign of loving compassion in the world.

And then he gets to why we read this particular passage from Isaiah in tandem with the story of Jesus' baptism. Berrigan says, "Baptism and confirmation are occasions to accept once more the first choice, to chose to be chosen." Baptism is always the start of something. You are chosen for a purpose, not just to have your name put in a book. To understand this chosen-ness in baptism, is to know something about yourself. It also means that you are given a task. That's what being chosen means; you are chosen for something. Even if you were the last one chosen for the kickball team, you still had a task whether or not you were a good kicker of the ball. To meet the ball when it came and give it as good a shot as you could.

Baptism makes us the servant in this poem. We accept God's mission, which is the healing of this world. Regardless of the work you do or the profession you pursue, your vocation is peacemaker, justice seeker, lover of souls. Following that vocation is your task. It is your sacred quest.

I said last week that Christianity is not for the faint-hearted. Put in the context of the servant, we see, that much is expected of us. Those divine expectations are not organized around success, they are organized around our willingness to try. The power of baptism lies in the fact that you have become a part of something larger than you are and in that context, trying is given a better chance. Phillip Berrigan said that "if enough Christians follow the Gospel, they can bring any state to its knees." This is not a pipe dream, it is true. If every even half of the Christians in this country took a stand and said, "it is not acceptable to have hungry and homeless people in our country," and then backed it up with action and demanded that our leaders do the same, trust me we would not be looking at cuts in necessary nutritional programs and an end to unemployment assistance. If enough people in the world knew that



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they have the power to end war, we could do it. But we have been convinced that we have no such power.

Daniel and Phillip Berrigan didn't necessarily think that they could end the endless wars but they knew that they were compelled to try. Their symbolic attacks on the machines of war have been a consistent call to know that we have choices about how we live with our neighbors. They look us in the eye and ask us what we stand for. They make it annoyingly simple and clear.

Daniel said, "I know that the prophetic vision is not popular today in some spiritual circles. But our task is not to be popular or to be seen as having an impact, but to speak the deepest truths that we know. We need to live our lives in accord with the deepest truths we know, even if doing so does not produce immediate results in the world."

In a moment, we will reaffirm our own Baptismal Covenant which has five questions after the Nicene Creed part. From our baptism we accept that we are worthy of being called by God. We understand the task put before us, to seek Christ in everyone, with love and respect and to strive - such a strong word - to strive for justice and peace in the world. That striving doesn't have to look like the example of the brothers Berrigan with its fugitive status and jail time but it probably involves some kind of risk. For young people, it could be standing up to bullying on someone else's behalf. That doesn't always make you popular. For adults, it may require you examine your traditional positions on issues. A commitment to peace, justice, and equality is a different set of lenses than an automatic interest in lower taxes.

You are the servant, the one chosen by God, chosen in baptism and sent out into the world. You are the one in whom God delights. When you know that, you can try anything.

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