

**REFLECTION**  
**November 21, 2021**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**

*John 18:33-37*

*I came into the world, to testify to the truth.  
Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

I wonder if you’ll help me out this morning. Let’s begin with a familiar Taize chant, like a prayer to begin this Reflection.

*Ubi Caritas et amor*

*Ubi Caritas, deus ebi est.*

(Repeat)

We’ll come back to this.

“A good friend of mine died today.” I remember these gripping words I heard on the NBC evening news program in 1974. Everyone watched the Huntley-Brinkley Report back then. It was a ground-breaking American evening news program that aired from 1956-1970. In those days the nightly news was just 15 minutes—though it expanded in 1963 to 30 minutes after CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite did so. Later the Huntley-Brinkley Report was succeeded by NBC Nightly News through the 1970s. Chet Huntley died of lung cancer in March, 1974, That night, David Brinkley opened the program with these simple but gripping words: “A good friend of mine died today.” What some people may not have realized after watching the two men for over twenty years was that they actually spent very little time together. Huntley reported from New York City and Brinkley reported from Washington, D.C. They rarely met in person, except for live coverage of political conventions, election nights, and a few other national events. But they were a team—about the same business—a journalist and television newscaster.

Remembering Brinkley’s simple but gripping words, I want to share with you that “A good friend *of mine* was buried yesterday.” Without saying anything more, we all know what this means. Loss. Grief. Lots of memories. And a sense of time and gratitude that point beyond the immediate circumstances of everyday.

The Very Reverend Van Gardner’s life and ministry was celebrated yesterday at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore where he served as Dean for over 20 years. It was in 1977 that Van and I were both ordained to the priesthood. Over and over again that year we were referred to as Gardner and Lewald (that was my maiden name). It always sounded to me as if we were thought of as rookies on the 1977 diocesan football team. Rather than black shirts and collars, I imagined

us in helmets and shoulder pads, with black marks under our eyes. Poised and ready to block and tackle. For over 45 years we both covered our parts of the field—good friends, though we didn't see each other very often.

You might not know, but Van was here at Epiphany on Nov 11, 2018. He sat right there where you are sitting, Yollette. Van was a history teacher before being ordained so it shouldn't have surprised me that on the 100th anniversary of the WWI Armistice, he might show up here at the Chapel. I kept looking at him during the service, wondering if it really was Van. After the service he simply said, "I didn't know what you were going to do on the centennial anniversary but I knew you would do something." That day we had a military band in the chancel who offered a full program of WWI music.

When I looked at today's Gospel—John's account of Jesus before Pilate, it is evident that John wants to give his readers a simple but gripping news flash—a farewell summary of Jesus' mission and ministry.

*"I came into the world, to testify to the truth.  
Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."*

What is Truth? News broadcasts these days aren't much help. They seem mostly to be *spin* and political and nasty partisanship. What in the world is the social and emotional origin of "Fake News?" I'll never understand.

Van's daughter shared with everyone at her father's funeral what her father said to her as they planned his memorial service together. (Yes, all rectors tend to control liturgies,—even their own funerals.) Van selected the Taize chant, *Ubi Caritas* to be sung by the congregation during communion.

*Ubi caritas et amor. Ubi Caritas. Deus ibi est.*

He asked his daughter, "Do you know what this means?" She asked him to explain. He said, "Where there is generosity and love, God is there." And he added, "It's that simple."

*Where there is generosity and love, God is there.*

This was the last time he was able to speak with her coherently as father to daughter. This is what Truth sounds like. "Where there is generosity and love, God is there." And when we live this way, generously and lovingly—this is what God's truth looks like. Living generously and lovingly, is not something that we do all at once. It is something *we grow into* as we learn to trust the generosity and love of God and practice at it. At Epiphany, God's Truth is the golden thread we have inherited—we continue *to grow into* being a

welcoming place for all people, regardless of our differences. At Epiphany, we continue *to grow into* genuine friendships—but more than this— *we grow into* shared vision and leadership and respect between people with different backgrounds and experiences. At Epiphany, we continue *to grow into* being a generous people—generous with each other and generous with ourselves—forgiving and giving, and sharing—generously and lovingly—our resources with each other. We continue *to grow into* God’s truth in Christ as we give thanks to God and remember what God has already done for us and with us. I hope I have helped us to become more generous and more loving along the way. I only regret my economies.

Here’s an important newsflash:

God alone holds the secret of a GENEROSITY  
by which we can love others not only as we love ourselves,  
but as God loves them. The beginning of this love is the will  
to let those we love be perfectly themselves... If in loving them  
we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness  
to ourselves, then we do not love them: we love only the reflection  
of ourselves we find in them. (Thomas Merton)

Please join with me as we practice and become God’s Truth—

*Ubi Caritas et amor*  
*Ubi Caritas, deus ebi est.*  
(Repeat)

Let me hear you sing it—without me.

*Ubi Caritas et amor*  
*Ubi Caritas, deus ebi est.*

Amen!