



# The Trinity Pulpit



## **The Power of One Ministry—One Body** **Acts 14:1-9; I Corinthians 12:26**

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Donald Miller in his book, *Blue like Jazz*, speaks of his journey from a self-centered Christianity to a community-centered Christianity in his chapter entitled “Living with Freaks.” He had always thought that Christianity was something one did alone, which fit him well since he was a writer. He liked living in the country by himself and writing books for people he would never meet. Then he met Rick, who challenged him to move in with five other guys in a home they called Graceland. This house, shared by these six unlikely companions, would become a place of transformation for Miller. It was there he discovered how to share life with others, what it meant to give up his desires for the good of others, how to adjust his schedule for another, and how to live in community as a Christian. One day he was looking at a picture of himself and the



others sitting on the front porch of their large home in San Francisco, and he noticed what a motley crew they were. The group consisted of Andrew, a protester; Jeremy, a cop wannabe who always carried a gun; Mike, an older trucker who wanted to be an advertising executive; Simon, a native of Ireland and a womanizer who came to America to study the American Church in order to return to Ireland to lead a revival; and Trevor, a young man, just out of high school, who did not know what he wanted to do except ride his motorcycle. Upon close examination of the picture, Miller wrote, “The picture is more than a picture of six guys but it is a picture of me in transition.” It was not a physical transition but an inner one. He was

on his way to discovering the blessing that comes from community.<sup>1</sup>

Theologian Paul Tillich once wrote:

We have considered the depth of the world and the depth of our souls. But we are only in a world through a community of men. And we can discover our souls only through the mirror of those who look at us. There is no depth of life without the depth of the common life.<sup>2</sup>

I think deep down we all know this to be true. This is why, in our culture, people chase this depth of commonality in every area of life: parents and their children find it in school relationships, many find it in their activities, and others go to the internet and find it

in the array of clubs, classes, gatherings and opportunities for community for any interest and life condition imaginable. In the depths of our souls, we know the truth: we are not an island unto ourselves. As the Bible tells us, two are better than one and it is not good for man to live alone. Life really finds a new depth when lived in community and shared with others.

The church has always been a place for community. In the very beginning, the church met together. Even before the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, those who would become the church were meeting together in community. Then the early

church would meet together for worship, prayer, fellowship and the Lord's Supper; however, as the church developed, their care for each other also became evident. They had the quality as described in Acts 4:34 as "not having any needy among them." We are told that they did not consider their property as something they should claim as just their own, but they viewed their resources as something to be shared in order to care for those who had need. The Bible tells us people would sell their homes or land, bring their money, and place it at the Apostles' feet; the money would then be distributed to those who were among them that had need. The first real conflict in the church was over how to care for the needy in the church. The result was the choosing of the seven – those we consider the first deacons of the church.

My point is simple: the church is a place where we find depth of community and we care for one another. It is the heart of our statement on ministry.

### **Ministry**

*Trinity Baptist Church values care and concern for one another within the church. We view each member as a part of a family of faith to be cherished and accepted as a brother or sister in Christ.*

If we all agree that the church is to be a community where we find care and we discover a depth of living, then what are the qualities of such a church? Let's look at the story of Paul's stoning and experience in Lystra for some understanding. This is one of those odd stories from scripture that seems to head in one direction then takes a turn, and we are surprised by the ending. Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra to preach. When they arrived, they found a man who was crippled in his feet. Paul spoke the word, "Stand up on your feet!" At that the man jumped up and began to walk." (Acts 14:10) Every one was so amazed that they began to worship Paul and Barnabas; they believed that the gods had come down to earth, and they called Barnabas Zeus and Paul Hermes, because he was the speaker. When Paul and Barnabas realized that they were being worshipped, they put an end to it. They tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd shouting, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and

earth and sea and everything in them." (Acts 14:15) Paul then began to share the gospel so they could understand it. Paul always began where the person or the people were, not where he was, spiritually. So, he began with the argument of God's provision and kindness toward the people; he did not quote scripture they would not know or maybe even believe, but he began with their experience so they could relate to God's love.

At that point everything seemed to be going well, but there is a change in the story when the Jews from Antioch showed up and convinced the crowd that Paul was evil and not of God. We are not told how this happened. All we know is that the Jews, or the leaders of Antioch and Iconinum, came and convinced the crowd that Paul and Barnabas were false teachers. It seems that in a moment's time the crowd goes from wanting to worship the two missionaries to stoning Paul and leaving him for dead outside the city gates.

Life is filled with highs and lows, and in this short passage, Paul and Barnabas have gone from a mountain-top high spiritually of people receiving the good news to being rejected, stoned, and left for dead. The people thought they had killed Paul, and this could have been the end of the story. However, that wasn't the end. The story continues with the incredible statement in verse 20, "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city."

That is an incredible statement of the depth of community. Paul was left for dead, but the disciples gathered around him. He not only survived, but he had the courage to get up and return to the very city where he had been stoned.

We don't know exactly what happened that day. But I think we can gain some insight about what type of community the church is to be from this statement about the disciples and Paul outside the city of Lystra.

First, let me suggest that the church is to be a gathering community. Paul was stoned and left for dead, but we are told that the disciples, or the church, gathered around him. Now, we know that we are to gather together; the early church gathered together, worshiped, and cared for each other. In Hebrews the church is encouraged to "not stop meeting together as some are in the habit of doing."

The church is constantly finding strength in gathering – community is built in gathering. However, the church is not only to gather together, but we are to gather where there is a need. That is ministry.

You will find Trinity gathering around a need in many places and moments. We gather around those who are homeless when we gather to care for families who are involved in WIHN. We gather around the poor when we gather at North Raleigh Ministries to work and minister. We not only gather around others in need, but we gather around each other in our moments of need.

Where do we gather? We gather in hospital waiting rooms while families wait for any news regarding their loved one who is sick or hurt. Just by our presence, we proclaim our love and God's love. We gather in funeral homes and around gravesites so that families do not have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death alone. We gather in homes when babies are born to remind the parents that this child has not only been born into a physical family but a larger spiritual family. We gather in other moments around the need of people and around moments of significance. We walk with each other and we gather with each other.

When Tyler was in his wreck last year we witnessed an interesting phenomenon. Tyler was on one side of the hospital floor and the young lady who was also injured was across the hall. There was a lobby in front of the elevator which separated the wings. In the days following the accident, this lobby became a place for gathering. Tyler's fraternity brothers and the young lady's sorority sisters, and others from our church and other churches in Wilmington came and sat for hours together. They would come by the dozens and crowd into Tyler's room and just stand there and stare at him. They would cry and weep. They had lost one friend who was killed and they looked at their other two friends in pain. I think they not only saw them but could, in some way, see themselves lying there. They knew, even if

they could not articulate it, that except by the grace of God it could have been them. They did not know what to say or do, but they did know this: deep down they had to be together. They knew they needed to gather not out of obligation but out of love and common life.

That is a picture of a church. We are a gathering people. We gather in moments of celebration and need not out of obligation; rather there is something deep within us that realizes the right thing to do is to gather around the one in need.



***“The church  
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A second quality is that the church is a healing community. We don't know what happened that day, but we do know that Paul was thought to be dead; however, the disciples gathered around him, he got up, and went back into the city where he had faced opposition. What happened? How could Paul be near death and then get up and go back with courage into the city? There was something healing and encouraging about the gathering of these disciples.

I think that is a picture which we need to grasp. I like the words “they gathered around Paul;” it is a beautiful picture of the church encircling Paul. They brought community to him and gathered him within themselves. I wonder what they did once they gathered around. I think we can use our imaginations here and be pretty close in our estimation to what happened.

They would have done exactly what we would do if we were to circle around one of our own who had been stoned and left for dead. Some of us would pray – we would pray for Paul's recovery. We would pray because we would know that in such a moment God needed to intervene. We would pray because we know that healing comes from God. We would pray because if Paul had been this close to death, then we would feel helpless and hopeless and the only thing we could do in such a moment would be to pray.

Do we realize the power of prayer for one another? Paul was constantly reminding the churches that he was praying for them. Now, in Paul's critical mo-

ment he needed their prayers. The church is a community that prays for each other. I want to encourage you to take to heart the importance of prayer for one another. I am convinced that your prayer for me and my family changes my life. I am convinced that your prayers for me keep me safe, guard my life, and grant to me wisdom for leadership that, quite frankly, I might not have without you. I am convinced that your prayers for me give me physical strength for my work. So, pray for each other.

However, I don't think they just prayed. I think they also got down on their knees and attended to his wounds. They must have touched him, wiped away the blood, and maybe even bandaged his wounds. I picture in my mind Paul not getting up alone. Perhaps he struggled to get his feet under him while two or more disciples lifted him to his feet and held him as he steadied himself. I also picture Paul not walking into Lystra that night alone, but maybe reentering with one disciple on each arm and the rest walking on each side of him, maybe some in front, on each side, and behind him. I imagine Paul went back into the city that stoned him, full of courage and with the church gathered around him.

In the days ahead, we might have to walk with each other like never before. Paul told us in 1 Corinthians that we are one body and that we are to suffer when one part suffers and rejoice when one part rejoices. There are many who are suffering in our midst. They have lost jobs, income, and hope

for their future. We must not let them walk alone. We must suffer alongside them. We must lift them up, gather around them, and walk into the future together. What will be needed in such moments is an acute sensitivity to the need of those around us.

We will also have to learn to rejoice with others. Not everyone will suffer in the days ahead. Some will not only have jobs, but they will succeed at those jobs. They will have children, buy new houses, get new jobs and maybe even raises and new income. In those moments there will be a tendency for them to feel guilty and even shame from their success during what are times of trouble for others. What will be our response to such people? We must rejoice with them just as we suffer with those who are troubled. What will be required in both situations will be grace, consideration, and the increased knowledge that life as a story about me, as an individual, is a lie. True life is really about a deepening sense of community.

George Fox, the great Quaker father, suggested that the church is not a place set apart from the world but a community called into the world, so that there is not a particular sacred space, but every space where we gather, in the name of Jesus, around a need, and with hearts of prayer and ministry, you find the church.

The depth of life is found in the depth of common life. ❖

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<sup>1</sup>Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 175-180.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Tillich, "Shaking the Foundations," *The Education of the Heart* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 223.

