

In her memoir *Between the River and Me: Living Beyond Cancer*, Carrie Host tells about a post graduate seminar she attended on writing poetry and prose. Allen Ginsburg was one of the visiting teachers. One day he gave the students this assignment:

5:30 a.m. is your starting point. Write any dialogue, but the dialogue cannot talk about what is really going on. Everything has to have something to do with 5:30 a.m. Begin writing now.

By the end of the class, and after everyone else had gone, Ginsburg saw that Carrie had gotten nowhere in the assignment. He came, stood by her, and said: **“Just write the end.”**

She responded, **“What?! How do I do that? I don’t even have a beginning.”**

“I know,” he said. **“Just write an ending, and I’ll look at it tomorrow morning before class.”**

So this thirty-something woman stayed up half the night writing the **“ending to beat all endings”** to the story. She went in the next morning an hour early, to get his personal attention to her masterful paragraph.

He took the paper, barely looked at it, and handed it back to her, and said: **“Oh, good. So now come up with all the ways that you can get there, and you’ll have your beginning, or at least, you’ll have your middle.”**

She was crestfallen. After all that work, she had wanted more. But, finally, she realized: there isn’t anything more to say.

She said, after it was over, that she learned one of the most important lessons she could ever learn about writing, and (as she later found out) about life itself.

That lesson appearing in the beginning of her book, in which Carrie Host had to look into her life in order to write meaning into its suffering, reminded me of a wonderful serendipitous afternoon I spent with **theologian, church historian, and author Justo Gonzalez.**

It was during seminary. Dr. Gonzalez came and lectured (or preached – it’s sometimes hard to separate the two in seminary – but it was in the chapel service.) Then he stayed for lunch, and a few of us students were invited to share with him and some

faculty members. Then, suddenly, lunch was over; everyone was off to their places to be. Dr. Gonzalez would not be doing any structured activity for another two hours, but someone had forgotten to schedule any activity for him in the interim – or even any place to be. My advisor asked me if I could just “hang out” with him. And that was my blessing – to just “hang out” with this man, whose work really enamored me.”

In our time together, Dr. Gonzalez told about how his father-in-law read a lot of mystery books. He had a strange habit, however. He would read the first two or three chapters – to get a notion of the gist of the plot and identification of the main characters. Then he would turn to the end and read the last chapter – to discover the solution to the mystery. That way – his father-in-law said – he didn’t have to divert his attention to trying to figure out the answer, and he could focus on the character development and plot elaboration.

It seemed pretty strange to me. Gonzalez said it did to him, too – that is, until he figured out that this is the purpose of the Book of Revelation. Once we read how it turns out, then we don’t have to trouble ourselves of how it all ends. God wins. We want to be with God. Now, let’s look at the character development and plot elaboration.

Not bad, I thought.

Find out the ending. Then figure out all the ways to get there, and we will have our beginning, or, at least, the middle.

This past week I presided, for the final time, over the Order of Elders May Day Apart. I am finishing my 12th and (by Conference Rule) last year as chair of the Order of Elders. I shared with them some pictures from a book Gussie High gave me – the 1976 Directory of United Methodist Ministers in West Virginia. I made a power point presentation of some of those pictures – to show how many of our colleagues we know looked by 36 years ago.

It was both funny and poignant. All of the ones still alive today have much more history today, than future.

- They have grown;
- they have had disappointments;
- they have had successes.
- They are all wiser than they were then.

Knowing what they know now, they can REinterpret the middle – the days between those pictures and today.

And as I thought on their lives – and my own – the music of Sonny Bono’s song kept playing in my head. **[PLAY THE MUSIC:]**

**CHORUS: The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da
Charleston was once the rage, uh huh
History has turned the page, uh huh
The mini skirts the current thing, uh huh
Teenybopper is our newborn king, uh huh
CHORUS: The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

In the Gospel lesson today, Saint John remembers Jesus telling about the coming of the Holy Spirit and how it will **bear witness to the truth**. Jesus told them then that they were not capable of understanding all these things – not now. But later – after the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension – then they could receive it.

Jesus did that quite often – telling the disciples things that they would only be able to understand later – not now.

Bishop John V. Taylor writes that **this Holy Spirit is the bond that holds history, current experience, and future hope altogether**. The office of the Holy Spirit is the **“go between God”** that connects past, present, and future all together with meaning – even when we are not able to understand it in the moment of now.

When we know the ending, we **can go back** and **write in the beginning**, or, **at least, the middle**.

**The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

When we live today in the best way we can, we give birth to a good tomorrow.

I don’t know what my future will hold – specifically. But I do know that the Spirit runs through it – with Truth that I often can only realize when I look into the rear view mirror.

- That’s walking by faith, not by present sight.

- But it's faith in which the beat goes on.
- It keeps pounding rhythms in my brain.
- And it keeps pounding rhythms in all our brains
- We know how it ends. We just don't know when and where it ends.

Now we just need to WRITE IN THE MIDDLE – giving each day the best we can, trusting in the One Who loves us more than we can ask or even imagine.

I often remember from Good Friday scripture readings one particular bit of dialogue more than any other: when **Pilate asked Jesus the question that still rings so powerfully: What is Truth?** Jesus did not answer Pilate then. He was not ready for the answer. **(Tradition says that Pilate was later, however, and that he became one of Jesus' disciples and became an evangelist in Europe. A monument in Switzerland, claiming to be the place of his death, tells of this.)**

In the climax of the movie *"A Few Good Men,"* Lt. Daniel Kaffee (played by Tom Cruise) is cross examining Colonel Nathan Jessup (played by Jack Nicholson). The dialogue goes like this:

Jessup: You want answers?

Kaffee: I think I'm entitled to them.

Jessup: You want answers?

Kaffee: I want the truth!

Jessup: You can't handle the truth! ...[And then Jessup goes on, in his tirade, to confess to multiple breaches of the law.]

God knows, Jesus knew, that we are *not always* able to handle the truth – not in that particular moment.

We would not give the car keys to an 8 year old child and tell them to drive themselves to 3rd Grade class. It would be a disaster. But in the fullness of time, that very same child will be ready to drive, even drive those same parents to where they need to go, even sometimes when they do not want to go there.

**The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

Adam and Eve were not yet mature enough to handle the knowledge of Good and Evil. At that stage of their immaturity, **instead of being able to form Godlike Judgments they became judgmental** – and that original sin continues.

**The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

Jesus knew that until after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the disciples would not understand the **Transfiguration**, the **healing miracles**, and **much of what He was teaching**.

At Pentecost, however, the Spirit of Truth gave them insight into what He had done and what He had taught, to where they would understand and would, by that same Spirit, **have the power to do things even greater than He had done – JUST AS HE SAID THEY WOULD.**

**The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

There are times when we experience things that just don't seem to make sense. But, in the fullness of time, we can look into the rear view mirror and understand.

One of the two hymns I most regret being taken out of the “old” hymnal for our present hymnal is called **“Once to Every Man and Nation,”** with lyrics based on a poem by James Russell Lowell:

**(1) Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, some great decision, offering each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light.**

**(4) Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong;
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.**

Truth is sometimes elusive. Sometimes we are looking in the wrong places. Sometimes we are plainly and simply not ready to understand it at that time.

But always, the Spirit of Truth is there for ALL the disciples of Jesus (even you and me) – if we just hold on. Walk by faith, even when you aren't presently able to see and understand.

Keep on keeping on.

The Spirit of Truth – that came at Pentecost – is **also the Spirit of Power**.

NOT power to do with what we want, **BUT** power to do God's bidding. Power to do Kingdom building.

Power **upon which the Church is established**.

On Pentecost, we celebrate the birthday of the Church.

On Pentecost, we remember that we (you and I) are part of something much larger than merely ourselves.

**The beat goes on, the beat goes on
Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain
La de da de de, la de da de da**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.