

I've always enjoyed courtroom dramas!  
I remember how much I loved the show 'Columbo.'  
I especially enjoyed the last scene in every episode, when Columbo,  
often using quotes from his wife (who we never met if there was one)  
would question the suspects,  
leading them into a trap from which the truth came out.  
It was fun to try to figure out who was the guilty one,  
and often, I was wrong!

Of course,  
there was the golden oldie of all, Sherlock Holmes, still popular.  
Or maybe you're an Agatha Christie fan.  
Did you grow up on Perry Mason episodes?  
Do you remember the series, Barretta...  
that detective with the pet cockatoo? Just in the spirit of trivia fun –  
do you remember that Cockatoo's name? **[FRED]**

I also fell in love with the PBS series about Brother Cadfael  
-his medieval ways of finding the truth fascinated me!  
There have been so many detective books & shows....  
and there are new ones ongoing & coming out all the time,  
including all the Law and Order series, True Detective,  
PBS's new series: Sherlock the year of the rabbit and more!

### **WHY DO WE LOVE THEM?**

At least partly because the good guys and gals usually win the day,  
at the last possible moment, with the odds stacked against them.  
The innocent victim accused is saved at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour,  
thanks to the clever wit of the detective or defense counsel.

I read Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys books.

I watched Wonder Woman and Superman.

I learned about good 'guys' with white hats & bad 'guys' wearing black.

I was taught to believe that the truth always worn out in the end.

But I'm no longer quite so naïve!

As we grow and mature, life hands us many disillusionments!

One of my disillusionments was the book 'To Kill a Mockingbird,'  
which I first read at around 10 years old.

That novel, about an African American family man, falsely accused

Of raping a poor white girl in the south, shocked me.

WHY? Because that man, an innocent victim, was found guilty...

Against all logical and true evidence to the contrary.

The BAD 'guys' won & the good 'guy' came to a bad end!

And then, when I was a young adult,

O.J. Simpson made the news in a BIG way.

After following this drama for days (as so many people did)

A case in which O. J. was accused of murdering his girlfriend,

& was found innocent, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

I learned that clever lawyers could win their cases,

But that the truth is not always crystal clear.

Later, I became aware, through my friend Rev. Laurie Tockey,

a prison chaplain, that 7-12% of all prisoners are innocent.

And we've learned that many of those now on death row

have been found NOT guilty, due to DNA & other evidence.

I remember as a child learning the words,

'Sticks & stones may break my bones,

but words can never hurt me.'

And though I tried hard to embrace that idea,  
instinctively, I knew it wasn't true.

I remember a quote I came across in sociology class,  
by Margaret Meade:

"A small group of thoughtful people with their voices & pens  
can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Words can be powerful.

They can be used for good, or as weapons, to hurt,  
sometimes in hidden, manipulative ways.

And words can be used very successfully,  
to hide the truth and to hide from the truth.

A clever speaker can persuade even an intelligent audience  
that wrong is right and can SO influence people  
that they can be manipulated to do anything they're told.

Part of the success of the Hitlers of this world  
Is their ability as speakers.

The Sadducees in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism were clever speakers,  
well practiced in debate.

They were the priestly aristocratic party, centered in Jerusalem.  
Sometimes you and I confuse the religious authorities of Jesus' day!

Unlike the Pharisees, who accepted  
the whole of the Hebrew scriptures as authoritative,  
the Sadducees accepted as scripture only the first 5 books  
(named the Pentateuch.)

The Pharisees were known by their devotion to the law,  
both the written law and the oral law  
(that which was passed down by word of mouth).

The scribes, who were experts in the law,

belonged for the most part, to the Pharisees.

The Sadducees followed only the letter of the law.  
For the most part, they were unconcerned about the spirit of the law.  
They rejected the oral legal traditions,  
    Sticking only to what was written down.  
They were opposed to any teaching NOT found in the Pentateuch,  
Such as the resurrection of the dead, which was a much later idea.

Their religion was unyielding and unchangeable.  
There was no room for new ideas.  
For the Sadducees, God's truths ended with a period, NOT a comma!

Remember, as we've traveled Luke's gospel this year,  
That the chief priests & scribes had already clashed with Jesus.

Jesus had driven out the money lenders,  
    overturned their booths in the temple,  
AND accused the priests  
    of allowing the temple to become a den of thieves.  
It's not hard to understand why  
    Jesus wasn't popular with the religious authorities!

Even after that, Jesus kept on going to the temple  
    to teach and to preach,  
    passing on his radical new ideas!

So, the religious traditionalists tried every which way to trip him up.  
They asked by what authority he was teaching & preaching,  
and Jesus mystified them by asking them  
    by what authority John the Baptist had baptized?  
    THEY WERE STUCK.....

If they said John's authority was only human,  
the people would turn on them;  
If they said it was God's authority,  
Jesus would ask why they didn't believe John.

To add insult to injury,  
Jesus then told them a story **against** the traditionalists:  
the story of the tenants in the vineyard  
who beat the servants sent to collect the harvest,  
and THEN, murdered the son.

After that, the chief priests and the scribes  
tried to find ways **to get rid of** Jesus.  
First, they tried the power of words.  
They tried to humiliate Jesus in arguments,  
using clever words to make him look stupid  
in front of the people.  
And when the chief priests and scribes failed,  
the Sadducees came with today's question!

They asked a question  
in which they wondered how the law,  
which to them was of paramount importance,  
could apply in a life after death.

They used the old Levitic law, where if a man died,  
the next brother down  
married the wife and cared for her and the children.  
The first born of this new marriage  
would be considered the dead brother's child.

Jesus took their question **seriously**.  
He invited them to understand that  
the next life is NOT like this life.  
He invited them to try to imagine something  
beyond their understanding.

The Sadducees were using legalism and logic  
to try to understand the truth,  
but in doing so, were keeping truth from themselves!

Plenty of US are also good at this kind of argument & debate.  
Discussion and thought are GOOD.  
However, they aren't the only things that are important.  
Emotion & intuition & sensing & feelings are important too.

After studying logic in philosophy classes in college,  
I concluded that logic is a good tool,  
but not the **only valid tool** in the quest for truth!

In our quest for truth  
(which is in large part, a church community's purpose)  
Discussion shouldn't exclude emotion, experience and intuition,  
AND those things shouldn't exclude discussion and reason.

Because anyone can use the Bible  
to prove that black is white.  
There are all sorts of contradictions in the Bible,  
If we look deeply enough & if we take verses out of context.

But although it's easy to use the Bible to support  
our own point of view if we want to do that,  
we wouldn't be reaching the truth.  
Instead we'd be hiding the truth by clever use of words.

In the end, it's the truth that counts,  
and reaching that truth takes work, openness & discussion.  
Work to discover exactly what is being said and meant,  
rather than relying ONLY on what a clever speaker says!

Reaching truth also requires openness  
to NEW ways of thinking,  
so that our God, who is still speaking,  
can touch the deepest parts of us.

And if those 2 things are right,  
then we'll know what is true,  
However clever the arguments of those  
who try to prove the contrary.

As Jesus says to those who claim to believe in him,  
"You will experience for yourselves the truth,  
And the truth will set you free!!!"

**MAY IT BE SO!** Amen.