

**Closing Eucharist  
Episcopal Youth Event  
June 25, 2011**

***Sermon by Bonnie Anderson, President of the House of Deputies***

Holy One, we pray for open hearts, that we may have courage always do your will. Amen

Hello EYE!!!! It is great to be here!

I am a lay person and so are most of you. So, if you are a baptized Christian, raise your hand. If you are an Episcopalian, raise your hand. Now, if you are baptized and a member of The Episcopal Church AND if you are not ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop THEN you, like me, are a lay person. Besides being the lay people or laity of the Church, we are all ministers also. Did you know it?

On page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer it asks the question:

***Who are the ministers of the Church?***

And the answer in the Book of Common Prayer is this:

*The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.*

***What is the ministry of the laity?***

*The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.*

I want to say something about the young people, the ministers, who stood up and told us about themselves last night. You know, to do that, takes courage. Even though we are a welcoming and affirming and responsive "audience", it can be daunting to stand up in front of a big group of people especially peers. But having the courage to do that can be life changing as well. I think the people standing in front of us last night and telling us true things about themselves is an example of God working in our lives. Not just in the lives of the people who spoke, but God working in the lives of those of us who heard them. We are changed when we hear how God has worked in someone's life and we are changed when we witness acts of courage. Somehow when someone is courageous and we witness it, it gives **us** courage. Courage is contagious. So thank you who spoke last night and thank you for supporting them.

As Christians, we have a good model for courage. Jesus on the cross is the symbol of hope and redemption, but most of all for me, Jesus on the cross is the symbol of courage. And following him TAKES courage.

How many of you here were baptized when you were a baby? How many were baptized later? Being baptized marks us as Christ's own forever. So the baptized are followers of Jesus. And even if

we were baptized when we were babies and our parents or guardians chose baptism for us, we get a chance to renew our baptismal covenant and to repeat the promises made on our behalf. In fact, we will do that today. Pay close attention to what you are saying. Making promises to God in front of each other is a big deal. In our baptismal vows we make promises that commit us to dangerous work. To dangerous but life-giving work. We promise to ask God for help along the way. And we have to know Jesus to follow him.

Contemporary society has tried to tame Jesus. Jesus was counter cultural. In the U.S. we sometimes see people wearing bracelets that have WWJD on them. Well the truth is before we can answer the question What Would Jesus Do, we all need to be sure we know what Jesus DID. It should be WDJD ...**What DID Jesus do?** If we really want to be followers of Christ, if we really mean what we say in our baptism, we have to study Jesus. I don't know about you, but when I am really trying to learn something, studying for a test for example, I make lists. I have a list I have been making since I was 17. I am still adding to it. When we are stuck with a difficult choice if we really KNOW Jesus, the more authentically we can ask for the guidance of Jesus.

So what DID Jesus do? Most importantly and most courageously, Jesus was crucified. But he wasn't just walking along the road one day and the politicians picked him up and decided to crucify him. Jesus stirred things up. He did stuff like be friends with people marginalized by society (tax collectors, unclean women), He healed people like lepers for instance, most people would not even touch them, he taught people to look at common things in different ways, He made people think for themselves not always saying "DO THIS" but he told stories and gave examples and set people thinking, he turned water into wine, most of us probably won't master that one, but if someone does be sure and give away the money you make from selling it. Jesus challenged the social order, he provided food for a whole hillside of people, he walked on water, he asked an unlikely woman to give him water, he compelled pigs possessed by demons to jump in the water, he appeared to the disciples and startled Peter so completely that Peter put on his clothes and jumped in the water, he NEVER acted like he thought he was a big deal. He was and is the **real** deal, He died on the cross and he rose from the dead. And his courage has forever changed our lives.

He was not passive. Jesus troubled the waters. That's *our* job if we are to follow Jesus. Our job is to upset any status quo that stands in the way of peace and justice, to question and do something about anything stands in the way of a reconciled world. That's why we are committed to mission. It's our job to turn this world upside down, to turn over the tables. To look outside ourselves with fresh eyes and then help others see the kingdom of God.

Every time we stand up for someone or stand up for something that really matters we are building the moral courage that defines us and strengthens our soul, that prompts to act in spite of fear.

We can help other people; build houses for them to live in, painting churches, learning about and respecting, valuing other cultures, serving the hungry and homeless, recycling, creating beautiful art, taking care of the elderly and children, learning sign language. There are many ways to follow Jesus and we use the gifts we are given for that purpose. Following Jesus means taking risks.

For example, what has happened to the lost art of speaking up? Where did it go?

Have you ever been someplace, in class, with a group of friends, and spoken up about something—unpopular, but necessary to name—something that you just could not remain silent about –

perhaps prompted by the Holy Spirit to speak?

Later on someone comes up to you and says, "I am really glad you spoke up about X. I feel the same way." Well, my response is, "Then why did you leave me hanging out there all by myself?" Sometimes we have to encourage others to speak up too and to be with them when they do. Simple acts, like going and standing beside someone when they are being courageous, can be a life changing show of support.

It is crucial that we speak up for others, with others and on behalf of others. All the time. Every time we let the chance to speak up for others go by, we slightly diminish ourselves.

As we saw last night, courage is contagious and once we see someone else being courageous our own courage is enlivened. We are the beneficiaries of the most courageous act of all. Jesus on the cross.

It's our job to follow Jesus, to say no to poverty, to say no to degradation of God's fragile earth, no to war, no to walls of injustice, no to discrimination, racism, bullying, exclusion. Yes to peace, inclusion, loving our neighbor and knowing we are the beloved community. And we have to come up with the life-giving alternatives to these things.

**And the Good News is that we don't have to do these things by ourselves.**

We have ancestors who came before us, who have forged a path of courage before us. We have them and we have each other and we have God's help when we ask.

I want to introduce you to some of our ancestors.

Most of the ancestors with us today are Episcopalians. You might recognize a few who weren't, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks. But all of the people joining us today by image were or are ministers, like you and me. What is special about these particular ancestors is they all had or have special gifts of the spirit. You have Special gifts too. And the gift that enlivens all of our other gifts is courage.

Among our ancestors is:

- a lay biblical scholar and theologian named Verna Dozier;
- there is Daisuke Kitagawa, founder of an Episcopal church in a WWII Japanese internment camp in California;
- Jim Kelsey, who led a whole diocese and a large part of the Episcopal Church in understanding and living what baptismal ministry really means;
- Jonathan Daniels, a seminary student turned civil rights activist shot and killed when defending an African American woman;
- Jeannie Wylie Kellerman, a journalist who used her writing gifts to challenge the unjust actions of a major automotive company displacing people in Detroit;
- eleven women who were ordained before the church gave official sanction to the ordination of women and the bishops who ordained them and the laity who supported them;
- Horace Boyer, a gifted musician who compiled and edited the "Lift Every Voice and Sing" hymnal;

- then there is our ancestor John, a baptizer who lived in the wilderness and ate locusts and honey, attracting people from the cities to come and be baptized.

These are just some of our ancestors each with, as it says in our reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, "a variety of gifts but the same spirit".

But the one gift that every single one of our ancestors has in common is *courage*.

Courage gives life to honesty, confidence, humility, compassion, integrity. Without courage, all these virtues lie dormant in us.

We are the baptized. And the true claim of baptism, as our courageous ancestor Jeannie Wylie Kellerman said, is "to wade in the water and be immersed in our Lord's perverse ethic of vulnerability and gain through loss".

Well my fellow ministers, I am from Detroit. Being the Motor City, we are big on seatbelts. I think sometimes we Episcopalians are big on seatbelts too. So I have a musical invitation for you. I invite you to JUMP INTO the waters of baptism. I invite you to be the ministers God created you to be.

I invite you to embrace courage – to take off your seatbelts and put on your bungee cord. I invite you to JUMP into your life with Jesus!

Amen.