

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

September 6, 2009

Proverbs 22

James 2:1-17

Mark 7:24-37

Proper 18b

Perhaps 7 or 8 years ago, St. Andrew's congregation began a year of study and discernment regarding the ministry of deacon. This process led to Cindy Nawrocki beginning her process toward ordination to the ministry of deacon. Cindy served our congregation for a number of years, before she was assigned by the Bishop to St. Marks, downtown. During that year of discernment we prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We studied what the Book of Common Prayer said about the ministry of deacon. We invited guests to come and speak to us about deacons. Among those who came to speak to us was Kathy Brower. Kathy had been a deacon since 1994, and I believed her to be the deacon most qualified to explain that ministry. I still remember her definition of the ministry of deacon. The deacon's ministry is "to raise hell and do the dishes".

She then explained this to us. "To do the dishes": A deacon calls the congregation to lives of service. In the Acts of the Apostles, the apostles called the first deacons to assist the community in its care for the widows and those in need. From that time, the deacon has exercised the ministry of service to those in need. This ministry of service is exercised symbolically in the liturgy. At the Eucharist, the deacon serves at the altar by setting the table before communion, and in washing the dishes afterward. After "washing the dishes", the deacon dismisses the congregation. The deacon sends the congregation out to love and serve the world in the name of Jesus.

The deacon proclaims the Gospel by reading it in the liturgy and by living it in action. As the letter to James says, faith calls for action. Faith in the Gospel of Jesus makes demands on the way we live. The deacon sends us out into the world in the power of the spirit to put into action good news we have heard.

The deacon's ministry is "to raise holy hell". In the rite of ordination of the deacon, the deacon is called to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world. The deacon's ministry is to raise holy hell with the church when it becomes too focused on itself. She is to raise holy hell when the church forgets that its primary purpose is to serve the world outside its walls. The deacon is to remind the baptized that they are called to imitate Jesus, and to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.

Today we welcome Kathy to St. Andrews to serve as deacon. We welcome her not only for what she brings to us but primarily for what she will call us to do for the world. The readings from Scripture today are perfect for our welcome of a new deacon. Proverbs reminds us that God sides with the poor against those who oppress them. James tells us that living out the Gospel is not about speaking nice words, or having nice thoughts regarding those who are poor, but by putting those nice words and thoughts into

action. It will be Kathy's ministry as deacon to call us to action. It is not Kathy's ministry to serve the poor for us, but, to remind us that service to the poor is an essential element of the Gospel. Kathy's ministry is to remind us that unless we act in service to the poor, our faith is dead.

The Gospel this weekend has two stories of healing, and irritation. Jesus heals the daughter of the gentile woman. The unnamed woman finds out that Jesus is in the neighborhood and comes to him with a request. Jesus gives the impression that he would prefer her to go away: Woman, don't you understand that I have come for the people of Israel? Don't you understand that my healing is not for you or your daughter? But the woman will not take "no" for an answer. Her daughter is sick. The woman has nothing to lose. She does not go away but stands toe to toe with Jesus. She irritates Jesus. She pushes him to extend his care for those outside the wall so Israel. The irritating woman pushes Jesus to realize that God's justice and mercy extends beyond Israel. Jesus moves from irritation to amazement at the faith of this gentile woman. Jesus heals her daughter.

The Gospel continues with the healing of the man born deaf. Mark tells us explicitly that the healing takes place by Jesus placing his fingers in the man's ears, and by spitting and touching his tongue. Jesus does not put his hands over the man's ears, but in them. This is not a gentle healing of kind words, but a deep radical digging out of that which was preventing the man from hearing. I cringe when I hear this Gospel.

What a perfect Gospel for our deacon to proclaim.

Kathy, welcome to St. Andrews. We pray that you call us to share your ministry. May you be faithful in your ministry of doing the dishes as you call us to share the ministry of service to the world. May you be faithful in your ministry of raising holy hell as you hold before us the suffering world that Jesus sends us to heal. Kathy, may yours be a ministry of irritation. May you irritate us by reminding us that God sides with the poor. May you irritate us by digging out those attitudes and prejudices which impede our hearing the Gospel. May you irritate us by pushing us beyond the walls of the church. May you irritate us by reminding us that mercy and justice of God extend to all. May you irritate us by calling us to a living faith of action. May you irritate us by bringing the needs of the world to us. May you irritate us by sending us out to serve and heal the world in his name.

Kathy, may these holy irritations be a blessing to us and to the world that Jesus sends us to serve. May these holy irritations be a blessing to us and to the world Jesus sends us to heal.