



CT Deacons Ordination

Sermon by

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Jeremiah 1:4- 9, Psalm 119:30-40, Acts 6:2-7, Luke 22:24-27

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Thank you, Bishop Ian and Bishop Laura, for inviting me to be here this morning, and to have the privilege of sharing my thoughts in this sermon. It gives me great joy to be with all of you on this glorious day for the of ordination of these Deacons. The Church and the world need more deacons, and I pray daily for God to raise up more people to follow this call.

Congratulations Jessie, Ned and Brett – in a few minutes you will join the Sacred Order of Deacons and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work that God has called each of you to do, just as He called Jeremiah.

By now, I think you **understand** the two-fold role of deacon in the Episcopal Church – servant and prophet. You **know** that you are under the authority of your bishops. You have an idea of what God is calling you to do. If you don't know all of that, see me after the service and **I will let you look through the first two sermons that I prepared for today that I cast aside!**

It seems to me, that this is not a time for me to retell you this information – even if I could craft it in a special or unique way that might inspire you. I decided to share some of my experiences and thoughts about the diaconate that I have acquired during my 27 years of ordained ministry. I have been privileged to be part of most of the history of this great rebirthing of this vital ministry and order of the Episcopal church. I thought that I would share with you some of the lessons that I have learned along the way. Trust me, there is not enough time for me to share ALL of what I have learned.

Be Patient (first and perhaps the hardest)

In the early days, deacons did not know what we were supposed to do or what we were supposed to be beyond servanthood; and in all honesty, we didn't know what the church expected of us. The church did not know how to do form a deacon, and they did not know what to do with us once we were ordained. Our early history reflects very little experience with deacons using their prophetic voices. But we have finally grown into the incredible ministry that now has the

structure AND the power with the Holy Spirit to change the world. We have grown to understand the way the diaconate can function not only as servant but also as prophet. **And just as it has taken time for the Order to grow, it will take you time to grow into the Order.** So be patient with yourself as you grow into this fascinating and exciting ministry.

Be a Leader

Carol Maddux is one of the two Archdeacons in the Diocese of Georgia. She recently posted the following on Facebook:

‘THIS is what being a deacon is all about. Leading where others won't go. Loving like Jesus. Working toward justice.’¹

It is simply not enough to be engaged in ministries that already exist – soup kitchens, shelters, prisons and many other places. These are definitely critical and vital ministries. But here is the reality. We have not done enough with the poor, the sick, and the lonely. This world is broken and hurting, and we need to go where others have not been. We need to be the eyes and ears of Jesus to see and listen to what is going on around us – in our communities and in our cities and states. We need to know that when we see or hear injustices – that this is a call for diaconal action. And then, we have to seek to find how we can be leaders in instigating change. We are often called to be community organizers who are rooted in the Baptismal Covenant. We are certainly called as Jeremiah was to speak the truth about the injustices that we find. We need to seek ways to engage others to help understand the situations, and, through prayer and creativity find actions that can begin to make a difference and bring the love of Jesus through our collective actions. We need to be leaders, so we can create sustainable solutions for the injustices that we discover, and then move on to the next place where God calls us to go.

Be Humble

Micah 6:8 says, ‘Do justice, love mercy (or kindness), and walk humbly with your God.’²

The world sometimes has a funny understanding of humility and being humble. Often it is perceived as almost a cowering – a stepping back – staying out of the limelight for fear of being someone with a big ego. I would like to suggest a meaning of humility that I have come to embrace and cherish. It has served me well. The definition I use is this: Humility is seeking to become who and what God has created me to be.

We can only do justice and love mercy when we embrace our authentic selves. We can only walk humbly with God in the fullness of who we are. I need to know myself – my talents and my shortcomings, my gifts and my liabilities, my strengths and my weaknesses. I am God’s child, and I am here on this earth to do what God needs me to do. So, I need to identify, embrace, and celebrate all my gifts and use them for God’s glory. We each need to do this so we

¹ Carol Maddux, Facebook quote

² Micah 6:8

can step up to do justice and to love mercy, and to walk with God to serve the people of God. Our ministry will never be successful if we are trying to be someone other than our true selves.

Be Optimistic

I have learned through my experience with an Organizational Development Model called Appreciative Inquiry, that what we focus on becomes our reality! It is very easy to get discouraged and perhaps even depressed when you start to see and hear what is really happening in this world of ours. So, if we look at the negative, we can only embrace negativity, and ultimately become a negative person. We are people of hope because we are the people of God. Hope does not die because of the world we live in – rather hope dies when we embrace the negativity and fall victim to the darkness around us. Resentment, fear, and anxiety are bred with negativity. Hope and love are born in the light of Christ.

Be Courageous

I once heard that the definition of courage is taking action in the face of fear. I love the John Michael Talbot song, *Be Not Afraid*. The refrain is “Be not afraid, I go before you always.”³ God is always present – He is already present wherever we are going! Some call this prevenient Grace.

In the reading from Jeremiah, we hear God saying to the young boy, “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you...”

Presiding Bishop Curry says, God is already at work in the world – we just need to find where He is and join Him. How will we know if it is God? Presiding Bishop Curry offers one simple test - ‘If it is not about love, it is not about God.’⁴

When you need to find some courage for doing the work that might seem impossible, I invite you to read and mediate on John 14: 12-14, one of the Gospel readings assigned for Pentecost.

“... the one who believes in me **will also do the works that I do [amazing, right? Jesus healed the sick, raised Lazarus from the dead, and we are going to do the same?]**

Jesus goes on to say:

and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. [Really, how is this even possible?]

13 I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.⁵

³ John Michael Talbot, *Be Not Afraid*

⁴ The Very Rev. Michael Curry

⁵ John 14:13 -14

Our reading from Jeremiah reminds us that doubt is part of the process, as well as fear when we face a challenge that we think we can't handle. But like Jeremiah who had reasons to doubt because he thought he was too young, and he thought that he didn't know how to speak; we too have doubts that followed us through the journey to ordination and will most likely come to you again as you engage in your ministry. But take courage and trust in God!

Now, for the most important message I have learned,

LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

We are occasionally asked to preach in our parishes where we serve. This is important so we can use our prophetic voice. But we also need to preach the gospel in the world. I have learned that this is NOT effective if I hold a Bible and start to 'preach the gospel'. It didn't work when others tried to do this with me. Rather, this is where we live the gospel. Again, I think this is the most important message I can share with you today.

How do we do this? First, we embrace our own experience of God's unconditional love for us. This is the fruit of the humility that I shared earlier. Then, we can share our stories with others. Loving unconditionally meant no judgement, no conditions. Jesus came to proclaim that "God so loved the world..." No exceptions! This is the core of our ministry. This is the message that we need to proclaim with our actions.

Unconditional love will never look the same for two different situations that you encounter, or two different people that you meet. As you grow into your ministry, whether it is diaconal or priestly, the message is the same. Love unconditionally. I offer you these words from Pat Zifcak, Archdeacon of the Diocese of Massachusetts.

If we carry the command to love each other as Jesus loves us beyond the walls of the church, we will be compelled to see what others do not see, to listen to stories and to tell our own, to smile and say hello instead of rushing by, and to remember that Jesus touches each person we encounter through our hands, our hearts, our voices. What do we want them to know about the Jesus we love?⁶

Be open to hearing what God is saying to you. The campus of URI has a logo that says, Think Big, we do. And Bishop Knisely has said to all of the community of believers, Lay and Ordained, to try something new and if it fails, don't worry. We will never move forward if we live in the past. Imagine what the people of God need and be creative in how it might happen.

What I have shared with you, is some of what I have learned and what is important to me. I do believe that God is with us, that the Holy Spirit empowers anyone who asks and seeks help, that we can do great works, that we can make a difference because I see it happening in the midst of chaos and despair. I see hope and resurrection. I see the old made new and see and know that

⁶ The Ven. Patricia Zidcak, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/posts/christopher/meet-evangelist-ven-patricia-zifcak>

things which were cast down are being raised up. I have experienced it in my own life, and I have been blessed to see in the lives of others.

Jesse, Ned, and Brett, please stand:

I leave you with this quote that I discovered on Facebook that was written by an author who is new to me, L. R. Knost.

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”⁷

Amen.

⁷ L.R.Knost: Editor-in-Chief/Holistic Parenting Magazine,
https://www.facebook.com/littleheartsbooks/?hc_ref=ARRrYhXcK9VqRV_e0Lv2yeaLXvzThsfRvP_o4OTKKVNIIu1v-kVRyPNuiS7qB_VhIEM&fref=nf