

Whom do you represent?

By Canon Anne E. Kitch



Sermon preached by the Rev. Canon Anne E. Kitch at the Ordination to the Diaconate of Mary Lou Divis and Donna Jean Kiessling on May 17, 2006, at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem.

Jeremiah 1:4-9
2 Corinthians 4:1-6
Luke 22:24-27

Canon Anne E. Kitch

Whom do you represent? Why are you here tonight? And, by the way, what does it mean to represent someone? Represent. To re-present. It comes from the Latin *praesentare*, “to see.” Thus, to re-present is to see again. To represent something means to stand for or symbolize that thing. It can mean to portray. To represent a person means to serve as a delegate or agent for that person, or to act as a spokesperson. So, whom do you represent tonight?

“Now the word of the Lord came to

me saying, before I formed you in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you.” Thus begins the call of Jeremiah, the great prophet. More than a call or vocation, his was almost a compulsion. It was no easy road to walk—being God’s prophet during a time of disaster and exile. Jeremiah was often uneasy in his call, if not downright outraged. From the beginning he wants out.

Please, I am only a kid. I really know nothing about this prophet business. Choose someone else, someone older and wiser.

But for God there are no excuses for not being who you are.

Don’t tell me your just a boy. Don’t you think I know who you are? Don’t you think I know what I am doing? I am God, after all. And you shall go to all to whom I send you and you shall speak whatever I command you. I have put my words into your mouth.

Literally with a touch of the holy hand, God places God’s own words into Jeremiah’s mouth. It could hardly be any clearer. It could hardly be any simpler.

It’s as simple as that, Mary Lou and Donna Jean. It is a simple as that, Bishop Paul. It is as simple as that, people gathered. God consecrates, the prophet delivers.

It would be easy to imagine that these lofty words about being consecrated before you were born apply not only to Jeremiah but to Donna Jean and Mary Lou as well. It would be easy in the context of this grand liturgy to think that these two women are somewhat exalted (or about to be.) Easy to think that since before they were born they were destined for this night, and for another night a few months from now when they will be set aside for priestly ministry. It would be easy—and it would let the rest of us off the hook. Because we could imagine that this service had nothing to do with us, with our ministry.

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Bishop Paul Marshall ordained Mary Lou Divis (left) and Donna Jean Kiessling to the Sacred Order of Deacon, May 17, 2006, at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem.

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It would be easy to think that Donna Jean and Mary Lou are special because God knows them in particular, knew them in fact from the very beginning. Knew that they had these gifts for ministry. In fact, gave them these gifts and now we as a church community are recognizing these gifts and calling these two women to use them to the fullest. It would be easy to think this and it would be true—but not the whole truth. Because this night is not just about Mary Lou and Donna Jean.

Is there anyone whom God doesn't know intimately? Any one who lacks gifts? Anyone among us who is not called? Whom do you represent? Why are you here?

We are here tonight to represent Christ and his Church. At least that's what it said on my invitation, didn't it on yours? That's what it says in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 855 in the Catechism if you want to look it up.) Under the section titled The Ministry, the first question asked is: Who are the ministers of the Church? The answer: lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons. The next four questions are—what is the ministry of the laity, what is the ministry of a bishop, what is the ministry of a priest, and what is the ministry of a deacon. And the answers? The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church, to bear witness to him wherever they may be...(so it begins). The ministry of a bishop is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle...(and so forth). The ministry of a priest is to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as a pastor to the people...(and it goes on). Guess how the ministry of a Deacon begins?

They all begin the same: to represent Christ and his Church. The particulars of how, are distinct for each office. But the call and context are the same. So whether you are here tonight as a lay person, or as a bishop, or as a priest, or as a deacon, or as someone about to become a deacon, we share this purpose. We are all called. Maybe you thought

this service tonight was about Mary Lou and Donna Jean, but it's not. It's about you. Whom do you represent? It's as simple as that. God calls, we deliver, work done, case closed. What is true for Jeremiah is true for Donna Jean and Mary Lou and is true for the rest of us. God knows us. God knows the gifts we have. God in fact gave us gifts for a reason and I'm quite sure the reason was not so we could sit on them.

All of us are known. All of us are gifted. All of us are called. Not necessary as prophets or as deacons, but each of us with different gifts appointed to different ministries. The goal of each is the same: to do God's will. To represent Christ. It's that simple. So why is it so hard, frightening, and intimidating? Why in our hearts of hearts do we want this liturgy to be all about these two women rather than think about our place in ministry?

Thank God, we are not on our own. "Do not be afraid, for I am with you to deliver you," God says to Jeremiah. And to the early church hundreds of years after Jeremiah the apostle Paul proclaims, "Since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. For we do not proclaim ourselves, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord." It is not for ourselves that we are here. It is not for Mary Lou and Donna Jean. It is for Christ, to represent Christ and his church.

If we are to represent Christ, then we must help the people around us, the world around us, to see again—to see Christ again. To represent Christ is to stand for, symbolize our savior. It is to serve as Christ's agent and spokesperson. This night is not just about Mary Lou and Donna Jean, it is about all of you here...and those not here. Perhaps tonight is especially about those not here and for those who don't even know that here is here. We, as a community, set aside these two women for the work of deacons so that the world might know Christ. If we are here to celebrate the gifts of Mary Lou and Donna Jean and not demand that they

use them, then we fail at the ministry of the church. If we gather because we are hungry and we know we will get fed, but do not then feed those beyond these walls, we are not the ministers of the Church that God calls us to be.

In preparation for tonight, Mary Lou and Donna Jean practiced preparing the altar. In a few moments, they will set the table for the first time as new deacons. They will reverently and gently set the table and prepare it for all of us to feast. They will prepare the space and by doing that they will prepare us as well. And when the feast is ready, they will serve us. But it will not, it cannot stop here. I hope that over the years of their formation, as they continue to learn to identify and use their gifts, as they become more and more the people God knows them to be, they will set many tables. I hope they will prepare many communities to receive the feast. And I hope this about all of you here tonight: that you too will use your gifts to prepare tables and spaces where people may come to know Christ. I pray that you will represent Christ and introduce others to the King and messiah who said, "I am among you as one who serves."

The ministry of a deacon is "to represent Christ and his church, particularly as a servant of those in need." Mary Lou and Donna Jean, I expect you to serve others with love and competence, daring and persistence, holy humor (and sometimes chocolate.)

The duty of all Christians is "to follow Christ, to come together week by week for corporate worship, to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God." (BCP p. 856) Know yourself as God knows you. Discover and revel in the gifts God gave you. Represent Christ with all that you are and all that you have. Amen.

The Rev. Canon Anne E. Kitch, canon for formation at the Cathedral Church of the Nativity, is a Morehouse author of several books for children.