

Courageous Change: Part Two
The Kellogg Lecture 2011
Episcopal Divinity School
May 5, 2011

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Welcome.

Before we continue on with the theoretical I would like to take a few moments to pause and consider the practice of courageous change. The work of these courageous Episcopalians is the practice of baptism, a radical practice that often involves the kind of loneliness that Dorothy Day calls, “the long loneliness” to which the only solution she says is the love that comes with community”

Now a recap of this morning’s lecture:

Courage is the juice that fuels proactive change. We want to be proactive about change because;

a. it’s a tool we can use for making good on our baptismal promises (our primary vocation) here a reminder to the “retired” among us—it’s not over yet you are still baptized.

And we want to be proactive about change because

b. change happens no matter what in fact, God is most likely in charge of change and we are in this with God and each other and called to participate.

At a “macro level” the analytics of change are:

- Courage
- External Forces
- Power

- Leadership

Power and leadership are two dynamics that support courageous change. I want to highlight three elemental power models and then identify sources of power.

However, one theological footnote here:

As it turns out, the real power, as my friend Harvey Guthrie says, is the exact opposite of what power is taken to mean. “Real power is subversive of not only those who claim power but of the very concept of power itself.”

Power models:

Since 1789 the Constitution of the Episcopal Church has included language in our constitution that binds us—all dioceses to all acts of General Convention. Dioceses accede to the General Convention. For instance in property litigation, the “hierarchical church” argument says that the property finally belongs to a whole church, not a bishop, a priest in a parish, the current congregation or a local enclave.

However, when we use the term “hierarchical” with regards to the function of ordained and lay ministry—the operational aspect of our ministries, we do not mean that we are to function in a hierarchy, in fact, exercising power in a strictly hierarchical methodology as we exercise our ministries is the opposite of Church teachings. We are a Church that heralds the ministry of all the baptized realized equally, but with gifts differing.

One of the things I love most about the Episcopal Church and that drew me to the Episcopal Church 35 years ago, are the seeming incongruities. Our church as a hierarchy held by the whole and the function of the laity, clergy and bishops as making up the whole but not prescribed to function in a hierarchical power model.

Recently, Neil Alexander, Bishop of the Diocese of Atlanta was asked by the College for Bishops to write a paper about the patterns of Anglican ecclesiology: Does the Anglican

Covenant fit? The paper was presented at the March, 2011 meeting of the House of Bishops. Bishop Alexander uses the image of a mobile to describe the interconnectedness of the organic life of the church. In describing the relationship between ecclesiology and polity he says this:

In everyday discourse, it seems that we use the two terms nearly synonymously. I believe we should distinguish between them. Ecclesiology is the theological framework that contains those things – in the scriptures, in the tradition, and in the experience of the church, about which the church is persuaded. In the Anglican tradition, for example, we are persuaded that bishops are essential. At the same time we recognize that some aspects of episcopal ministry, known to the great tradition, are not persuasive to us. In contrast, we find comparatively little in the scriptures, almost nothing in the tradition, and from the standpoint of experience mostly painful laments, about the role of the laity in the leadership and governance of the body for most of church history. But as Episcopalians we have long been persuaded that hearing the voices of the whole church, and giving those voices the gift of authority, are hallmarks of our ecclesial identity. It seems good to recall that since the middle of the 16th century, the supreme governor of the Church of England has been a layperson.

Ecclesiology, then, concerns those things regarding the church about which we are persuaded. Polity, by contrast, is the practical embodiment of that ecclesiology; the working out formally in constitutions, canons, and policies, and informally, in customs, practices, and ethos, those things of which we are persuaded. What that means, of course, is that every change we make to our churchwide or diocesan canons, every time we enact a new policy, every time we subscribe to a formulation like the quadrilateral, every time we enter into an official ecumenical agreement, or consider signing on to a covenant, we are setting the mobile in motion. I do not believe ecclesiology and polity are quite the same thing, but they are organically related and to change one is to almost surely change the other.

Let me hasten to say that I do not intend that point to be an argument in favor of a static understanding of ecclesiology that must be protected from the relentless encroachments of the canonists. Quite the contrary. Some of us, I suspect, would argue for a hierarchy of sorts between our received ecclesiology and how it gets embodied in polity. I would argue that the relationship between the two is non-hierarchical and organic. What we need to remind ourselves of is not that one – ecclesiology -- comes first as the judge of the other -- polity, but rather that while different, the two are inextricably related and interactive.

Third, I want to remind us of the deeply rooted tendency in Anglicanism to hold steadfast to what we know here and now and be suspicious, at least initially, of pretty much anything that comes from somewhere else. I say it that way to indicate that in my reading of our history it is a bit more complicated than to say simply that we prefer the bottom up to the top down. That's way too simplistic. To say, for example, that we are bottom-up not top-down implies that we are anti- or at least non-hierarchical. That suggests that authority resides at the bottom of the hierarchy and that the higher one moves the more marginalized one becomes; perhaps true enough in our daily life as bishops but not really reflective of our ecclesiology. Such thinking teases us to consider the impossibility of being a democratically organized and governed church while being episcopally led at one and the same time, when, in fact, it is precisely what we do everyday.

In the practical application of the catechism, I envision clergy, laity and bishops, functioning in a circular power model.

Q: Who are the ministers of the Church?

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

We have a ways to go to make our music and words match on this one. For the most part, the laity, clergy and bishops all behave as if the laity are the consumers of the ministry of the clergy, the clergy are the consumers of the bishop's ministry and the bishops meet together a few times each year so they can minister to each other. Instead of all the baptized using the power we have been given at our baptism to do God's work in the world with God's help, we minister inside an organizational box and exercise power in a hierarchical power model where mutual affirmation, affection, support and ministry are missed opportunities.

Let me show you what I mean:

- Hierarchical – shown graphically by a triangle. Power is exercised from the top down, by a few leaders. In the best of the hierarchical power model the leadership is chosen by the people (the largest number who are at the base of the triangle) and are accountable to them in measurable ways. In the worst scenario leaders at the top wield their power without accountability.
- Laissez Faire – shown graphically by small circles not in organized relationship. Power is exercised by all members but without guidance or coordination from leaders. Requires highly skilled, self-motivated participants.
- Circular – shown graphically by a circle with arrows pointing in a circular motion around the circle. Power is exercised by all members and coordinated by leaders chosen by the members.

The best chance we have to get real traction on the baptismal promises we make, is by living most of our lives in Christian community where, as Harvey said, "Real power is subversive of not only those who claim power but of the very concept of power itself." Christian community where Dorothy Day reminds us love, the solution to the long loneliness, is found.

In his writing on the vocation of the Church, William Stringfellow refers to the Church as "the exemplary principality" (p.147 "A Keeper of the Word), Stringfellow says this, "So the

ideas of a non-institutional church seem to me to be as nebulous as the Greek philosophy from which such ideas come and contrary to the biblical precedent. That does not temper my critique of the inherited churchly institutions; in fact it sharpens it and makes it more urgent. Now that mark that verifies the integrity of the church as institution and sets the church apart from the other institutions – the state, the university, the Pentagon, General Electric,- as the exemplary or pioneer or holy institution is the freedom of the church from primary and controlling concern about her own survival. Survival of the institution is the operative ethic of all institutions, in their fallenness. The church is called into being in freedom from that ethic of survival and where renewal or reformation in the church happens for real, that very freedom is being exercised and the church is viable and faithful.”

But is our church viable and faithful? Stringfellow, in 1975 mused about the viability of the Episcopal Church as an institution “being worthy of the commitment and participation of human beings”. In a written reflection published in *The Witness* magazine, entitled “On Being Haunted by the Angel of the Church at Sardis”, Stringfellow points to “a moment of remarkable uncertainty for the destiny of the Episcopal Church” and asks if the Episcopal Church is consigned to death. Although Stringfellow cites the July 29th ordination of the new priests as a precipitating issue, he contends that “the Episcopal church’s tribulation is but an instance of the disintegration in the present day of the Constantinian Accommodation, which has shaped Christendom in the West since the fourth century, by which the church, refuting apostolic precedent, acquired a radical, vested interest in the established order and became culpable, identified with the institutional status quo in culture and society, in economics and politics, in warfare and imperialism, in racism and sexism.”

Today’s “tribulations” or as the south refers to the civil war as “the recent unpleasantness” the church’s decreasing membership, the angst in the Anglican communion, property disputes, and the blame placed upon the affirmation and inclusion and celebration of the fullness of life of all people into this part of the body of Christ that we call The Episcopal Church, is but another episode that begs us to answer the question raised by Stringfellow 36 years ago:

Is the Episcopal Church any longer capable of significant change for the sake of reclaiming an authentic life as a church of Jesus Christ, as a church having “a name of being alive? To be a church alive, not an institution or organization primarily concerned about preserving itself, the notion of an empowered laity.....

Although the notion of an empowered laity can appear simplistic and idealistic I call to mind Margaret Mead who said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever does.” Borrowing from Margaret Mead, I would say, Never doubt that two million citizens of God’s church who Verna Dozier called the sleeping giant, can change the church and ultimately the world.

The significant change we need is the authority of the laity in the full life of the Church and the Church as the support system for the ministry of the laity in the world.

With the circular power model we have a chance at it. The traditional hierarchical model sets us all up to be distanced from each other, keeps the person at the top particularly isolated, and in many instances, gives him or her a false sense of their own power, which causes further isolation from the community they are called to serve. The traditional hierarchical model exercised in the Church as an organization, causes the isolated hierarchical leader to desperately, but naturally, seek collegiality with others who are isolated and share the same power, distancing them further and turning them into their own principality.

Where does power come from? With the exception of personal power, we “ascribe” power to others –and sometimes we aren’t even aware when we do it. Here are some examples:

- Ascribed power: acquired through election, heredity, promotion, appointment (presidents, queens, presiding bishops, deans, popes, rectors, dictators, politicians, Archbishops of Canterbury, CEOs)

- Referent power: acquired through association with or appointment by a person of power or access to resources (Canons, chiefs of staff, rector's wardens, wealthy people)
- Personal Power: acquired by wisdom, charisma, skill sets (artists, social activists, some religious leaders)
- Coercive power: acquired by the ability to inflict demise or reward (police, parents, teachers)

Some examples may fit more than one category and the list is not exhaustive. Power is a good thing, the destructive component of power is how power is used.

This morning I talked about dynamic change—and the importance of looking at the external forces. The rubrics or analytics of courageous change can apply to organizational model entities—churches, dioceses, work settings, seminaries,—what is going on around us—change factors, power dynamics all affect our ability to serve effectively as leaders and leadership. Power, combined with courage can disable or enable positive change.

Analytics of courageous change take into account:

External factors

Power dynamics, and

Leadership

The final chapter of the book, "Leadership on the Line" written by, Ron Heifitz and Marty Linsky is titled "Sacred Heart." In this chapter Heifitz and Linsky describe leadership as an expression of aliveness. Aliveness, they say "creativity and daring" but what I would describe as courage, can erode as leaders get "beat up, put down or silenced".

In the struggle to save themselves, leaders sometimes put on a 'cloak of self protection, giving up their innocence, curiosity and compassion and cloak these essential qualities of aliveness with cynicism, arrogance and callousness. When leaders experience strong resistance and the heart of leadership feels diminished, it is only human to hunker down.

But sometimes the result is “losing heart” and when we do:

- Innocence and vulnerability is replaced with cynicism dressed up as realism.
- Curiosity becomes arrogance dressed up as knowledge: Been there, done that.
- Compassion becomes callousness and is replaced by thick skinned experience. Same old, same old.

It is natural to embrace adaptive measures of self-protection. One of the lost mentors to many of us in The Episcopal Church is Rabbi Friedman. His systems theory and practice seminars in Bethesda shed new light on family systems theory that many of us adapted and applied to congregations and dioceses. He used to talk about the art of analyzing systems, truth telling, he talked about the challenge to existing systems and the ways we could expect resistance to change to manifest itself. To many disheartened leaders I have repeated one particular piece of wisdom from Rabbi Friedman “When you are working on changing a system and you get strong resistance, consider it applause.”

Even though his words of wisdom are some solace, keeping an open heart in the face of strong resistance can be very difficult. But an open heart is the key to successful leadership and keep it we must if we are to make our way toward a reconciled world. At the same time that keeping an open heart professes the vulnerability of the leader, contemporary concepts of leadership reflect a leader possessing the power and isolation of a superhero who wields the power symbol for all his or her followers to see, all the while making just the right decisions so followers need only to sit back and watch how well they are being taken care of. That kind of hierarchical leadership style isolates not only the leadership from the constituents, but isolates the leader from his or her heart.

Leadership, particularly in the Church, that reflects a power, subversive of not only those who claim power but of the very concept of power itself, begs to be in community, begs to

be supported by worship and prayer and is dangerous beyond belief. Because this kind of leadership is patterned after Jesus and we all know the kind of rocky road that is.

Remember the words of Dorothy Day, "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

Leadership exercised in community, true leadership in relationship with a community is a rare art. It is the art practiced by Christ in the community of disciples. It is the art practiced by leaders who last. It is the art of courageous change and it is fueled by an open heart willing to solicit answers to questions like "how are we doing, how am I doing, what could we do better, what needs to change, are we still together, what gifts do we have that aren't being fully utilized?"

A circular power model works best in true community. The leadership moves among the members of the community according to the gifts needed. In a circular power model we are free to make mistakes, to reevaluate, to become more whole, more honest and most of all, to become closer to Jesus. But make no mistake, this kind of leadership is the most difficult, requires the most attention. Leadership in a circular model initially takes much more time and skill to implement than the hierarchical model where one person or persons with ascribed or referent power tell everyone else on the bottom tier what to do. But leadership for change in community is the only place we will find the truly sustaining love that will change our own lives and it is the only kind of leadership that will be ultimately embraced by a relevant Church.

Remembering why we are leaders, why the Church is our venue, why we are willing to face resistance, why we do all this anyway.... It is because of this:

at our baptism and every single time we renew our baptismal covenant, we make promises to God in the context of our community. We face difficult resistance, isolation, loneliness, and through it all we see Christ in each other. It is in those Christian communities that we did not choose for ourselves, we are called to practice our way of being in the world. In our

Christian communities we are called, as Nora Gallagher reminds us to practice the resurrection, over and over again. Together we calculate the external forces, we analyze the power, we assume leadership and with our community of service, we get courage to do what we have promised to do at our baptism.

No mere ritual for church membership, baptism places each of us in an ancestral line of wild people, John the Baptizer and Jesus for instance. Baptism, in the words of my friend Jeanie Wylie-Kellerman, baptism requires “obedience to our Lord’s perverse ethic of vulnerability and gain through loss.”

Baptism calls us to dangerous and courageous work in this world. And like all ...that is what these lectures are about.

I hold fast to the knowledge that our baptism is not only the salvation of our souls, baptism, held sacred by God and the baptized, is the salvation of God’s church.

Prodding the Church along from a potentially irrelevant organization to a life-giving movement ...that is about our baptism. It is about how the very institution of the Church can support the fulfillment of the baptismal promises.

Most of all, we must have a formidable courage born out of deep love and faith. And we need to be in Christian community that is authentic and truthful.

Don’t put your bungee cords away!