

## **Journey Jottings: Notes from St. Luke's Deacon in Formation**

Because this year's Easter Triduum fell on the weekend that we normally have deacon formation classes—the third Saturday of the month—we had the luxury of an extra week to read, study, and complete assignments. As wonderful as that additional time was, it also meant that there would be only three weeks until our next class—which really made me agree with whoever said, “you can't rob Peter to pay Paul!”

Our day started, as usual, with Morning Prayer in the chancel of the Cathedral. What was not usual, however, was that we were joined by three transitional deacons who had come for the anti-racism training that was being given that day (required by canon law for ordination). It's part of the second-year DFA curriculum, so Amy, Susan and I will be receiving that training next year, at about this time. If you are not familiar with the term “transitional deacon,” I can save you a Google search. Transitional deacons are priest candidates who have been ordained deacon *as part of their program of preparation for priesthood*. Canon law requires that they serve as deacons for at least six months, but all the while, they are “en route” to being priests. This contrasts with “vocational deacons” (like Amy, Susan, and me; and Deacon Chris and Deacon Kimball at St. Luke's), whose final, and only, “destination” is the diaconate.

But back to my recap. While the Class of 2019 and the transitional deacons were receiving anti-racism training, Amy, Susan, and I had the wonderful experience of being with Rev. Elizabeth Roles for an all-day class on Scripture—a topic that she loves, both personally, and in her various public ministries as a priest. She began by noting that, even though one of the “competencies” required for ordination is a basic understanding of Scripture, we'll miss most of what Scripture “is” if we approach it exclusively from an intellectual, academic perspective. Her advice to us was this: Immerse yourself in Scripture! Read it daily, pray with it, study it, use it, and love it! And in so doing, your life will proclaim the Gospel!

After sharing and discussing how Scripture has informed and shaped our personal lives over the years, we looked at how the Church regards Scripture, with particular attention to the authority that Scripture “wields” in the governance and guidance of the Church. Simply put—and flowing out of Richard Hooker's theology—Scripture is one of three, co-equal sources of ecclesial authority, the other two being tradition and reason. Because the focus of the day was Scripture (not Canons and Constitutions, which comes next year!), we found and discussed several places in the *The Book of Common Prayer* that point out the centrality of Scripture in our identity as Episcopalians: in the Catechism (pp. 853-

854); in the Articles of Religion (p. 868), and in the Ordination Services for bishops, priests and deacons (pp. 513, 526 and 538).

The morning session ended with each of us going to a quiet place of our own choosing on the Cathedral grounds, and praying with Scripture for 45 minutes, using the method known as “Lectio Divina,” and the text of John 1:35-42. Afterwards, we “re-grouped” in our classroom to talk about the experience, and to share with each other what had emerged as we used this approach to Scripture.

Our afternoon session began by looking at the basics of another way to approach Scripture: through studying it. We were introduced to the specialized, esoteric world—and vocabulary—of Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis (both words refer to the interpretation of Scripture), and the various methods that are used in doing it: textual criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, lexical analysis; literary criticism, and narrative criticism. One would have to be a graduate student in Biblical studies to truly understand any of these approaches, but the overview was helpful, and it gave us some familiarity with the terminology used in the interpretation of Scripture. We also were given a wealth of Biblical resource materials (titles and authors of books; internet links; and printed handouts) that can help to bring depth to sermons, talks on Scripture, and Bible studies.

As a pre-class assignment, Rev. Elizabeth had asked each of us to write a paper that tied together a theme and a story from the Old Testament, and a “moment of ministry” story, related to the theme, from our own lives. Each of us had chosen a different theme, so our papers, which were presented orally, were all very different, too. The point of the assignment was to use personal experiences to proclaim the Good News in the here and now. So that is how we ended our day: listening to one another, and hearing the echos of ancient, Scriptural themes in contemporary stories from our own lives.

Because Scripture is part of the foundation of who we are as a Church, we will have a second class on Scripture, in May, focused on the New Testament. Pre-class assignments include interviewing a priest who has recently graduated from seminary, and making a list of his/her favorite commentaries and resources for sermons and Bible studies; and preparing a 30-minute Bible study on a New Testament text that deals with “the poor.” The text I’ve chosen is Luke 16:19-31: the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

Your prayers are both appreciated and felt as this journey to the diaconate continues. Thank you, also, for the many sweet and concrete ways that you show your support! Your emails, texts, cards, kind words when you see me, and hugs, keep me going for days! Easter peace and joy to all!

—Keehna Sture