

A Sermon Preached at the Thanksgiving Eucharist
for the Life of the Reverend Canon Clinton R. Jones
at Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, Connecticut
on June 7, 2006
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In the name of the Living God, who Creates, Redeems, and Inspires us. AMEN.

A charter oak has been plucked from Connecticut's ecclesiastical forest. Though small in physical stature, he stood tall in so many of our lives. He was a steady and ever faithful source of compassion, inspiration, and unconditional love.

Canon Jones might well say that he has now journeyed to a better place, but we know that we are better people in better places in our lives and faith because he journeyed in our midst for so long. His quiet, unassuming ministries over more than sixty five years have had an impact on this Cathedral, on this community, and on individual lives in ways which surpass the memory or the imagination of any of us. For some of us he brought acceptance and inclusion. To others of us he offered enlightenment and education. With many of us, he worked for justice and compassion for all sorts and conditions of men, women, and children, not only in this place, but across this land and around this fragile globe.

Canon Jones well understood that at the core of Christian community is the need for trustworthy pastoral care at the wonder moments and in the crises of our lives, His life and ministry were punctuated by baptisms, weddings. And countless visits to hospitals, prisons, and homes, as well as innumerable funerals and burials, yes, truly, innumerable funerals and burials! To each he brought a listening ear, a wise word, and invariably the unconditional Love of God. But pastoral care in and of itself was not enough. Canon Jones also possessed a passion for justice which knew no bounds. He gently pressed us all to throw open the doors of our churches and the doors of our hearts to all who would come in. His almost Victorian manners and his gracious and unassuming ways sometimes blinded us to the almost revolutionary transformative work of the Gospel he was often undertaking.

Canon Jones thoroughly grasped the words of the Prophets and the social implications of the Gospel. The words of Isaiah 61 were almost like his job description: "Bringing good news to the oppressed; binding up the brokenhearted; proclaiming liberty to captives; proclaiming release for prisoners; comforting those who mourn." Often, the good news was that in the process of his ministry, many of us were inspired to be about that prophetic work as well.

Canon Jones was an avid reader and an earnest scholar all of his life. His personal theological library did not close down when he graduated from The General Theological Seminary in 1941. He wrestled regularly with the Scriptures, and often with St. Paul, in particular. But like St. Paul in Romans 8, he early on concluded that "neither death, nor

life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Over time, Canon Jones came to press that message even further and more clearly than St. Paul had done:

NOTHING COULD SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD:

Not wealth, or poverty, or homelessness;

Not immigration or assimilation;

Not gender dysphoria or a sex change operation;

Not mental illness, physical disability, or some kind of addiction;

Not being imprisoned or being on parole;

Not having a troubled adolescence or an unruly senile dementia;

Not being married, single, celibate, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transvestite, or transsexual;

Not being White, or Black, or Asian, or Hispanic, or Native American.

In his view, all the walls which separate or exclude any of us from the Love of God needed to come tumbling down. The challenge then became how we all could learn to live together – all of us – in communities marked by Justice, Love, and Peace? Ultimately, the question becomes: Will our neighbors know we are Christians by our Love?

Canon Jones was a priest and a pastor inspired by the Biblical image of the Good Shepherd, both in Ezekiel and in the passage we heard from John 10. He understood full well that in the final analysis only God or Jesus himself is truly the Good Shepherd of the flock. The rest of us are at best poor imitations – perhaps more like sheep dogs than shepherds. We really do endeavor to carry out the shepherd’s work, but often that means barking, running in circles, and attending committee meetings. Nonetheless, the flock – the congregation – needs the best that we can offer. Members of the flock need to be recognized, called by name, and attended in appropriate ways in times of need or crisis. At times we all need protection from one or another of the wolves of this world. Some of us have been wounded already by the neglect or abuse of the hired hands who were meant to be our shepherds. Canon Jones’ vision and hope were that each and every one of us in this motley flock called the Church, might yet find welcome, safety, hospitality nurture, rest for our souls, and the inspiration to live into the full implications of our Baptismal Vows.

Finally, let me speak in a somewhat more personal and even slightly polemical way. We hear much in our culture about “traditional family values.” It is a phrase which we all need to take back and make our own. In a sense much of Canon Clinton Jones’ life and ministry was about just that.

We are a nation., and sometimes a Church, which has somehow lost its manners, but Canon Jones never lost his. Perhaps we all need to reclaim them. He endeavored always

to offer hospitality to friends, neighbors, enemies, and strangers. He knew that sometimes we entertaining angels unaware. Some of his dinner parties were legend!

He valued family greatly. As the only child in his family to survive infancy, he cherished his artistic mother who died young; his father who struggled to continue farming in the depression; his gracious stepmother, his aunt; his beloved cousins and their children and grandchildren. He loved Mrs. Conlon, with whom he shared a home for many years, as well as her extended family. He treasured the many young men who found shelter and safe haven under his roof. He was devoted to his beloved partner, Kenneth, with whom he shared more than 40 years of love and care; to his dear friend Carol, who has shared their home for many years; and to so many others of us who came to feel a part of that family, too.

I've often said that had he not been Canon Jones, he could just as well have been Uncle Clinton, a steady, loving, and supportive avuncular presence in our lives. In a strange and wonderful way, he came to embody FAMILY, often for those who had none to welcome them home.

He also valued institutions, with a deep sense of gratitude. His loyalty to Bard College and to The General Theological Seminary knew no bounds. They had enriched his life and prepared him for ministry and he never stopped saying thank you in tangible ways.

Indeed, gratitude was one of those traditional values that Canon Jones honored to the very end. A meal never began without a grace. A day never ended without a prayer. An act of kindness or hospitality never went without a thank you note. That sense of gratitude radiated throughout his life – in his preaching – at the altar for the Eucharist – and in all of his personal relationships.

Each of us has stories to tell on this day when we remember and give thanks for the life of Canon Clinton Jones. There will be time over lunch and in the days and months ahead for each of us to share those stories – they are blessings we will carry forward in our lives and ministries – even as we carry Canon Jones in our hearts and in our prayers.

When I was given this assignment some years ago, Canon Jones gave me two instructions: “No eulogy and don't wave your arms.”

Well Canon Jones, at least I tried to keep my arms still.

May the souls of the departed rest in peace. Amen.