



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Legacies and Love Lifted Up

By The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

May 20, 2012

"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father." This year, I decided not to focus on the usual questions prompted by this reading from the Acts of the Apostles and its inclusion in the creed. As you know, I don't generally worry about the "did it really happen" question and prefer the angle of "what do we learn from such a story?" So today I am putting aside the issue of what it might mean to ascend into heaven still carrying our wounds or what it means to sit at God's right hand. Today, I am interested in what it might mean to think of Jesus as having been "lifted up". What does it mean for something to be lifted up?

We have hymns that use the image of lifting up - "Lift high the cross," Lift every voice and sing," "Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates," an Easter hymn that I do not know, "Lift your voice rejoicing, Mary." And then there's "When Christ was lifted from the earth." At first, he was lifted painfully on the cross, to make an example of those who would challenge the authority of Rome, but then he was lifted up in glory, to make an example of what is important to God. In these hymns, many things are lifted, cross, voice, heads, Christ. There's clearly more involved here than just the Ascension.

In the dialogue that begins the celebration of the Eucharist, we begin with what is called the *sursum corda*, a vestige from the time when all worship was in Latin. *Sursum corda* literally means "upward hearts." Articles and pronouns are implied, and so in today's prayer book it reads "Lift up your hearts". There is also a sense in the word *sursum* of coming from below. The response in Latin is *Habemus ad Dominum*, which means "We give them to the Lord", and our Anglican tradition says "We lift them up to the Lord". The Latin presumes that God is above, and the English translation proclaims it.

In this little dialogue the inner meaning of lifting something up is made real. In the Eucharist we start with our hearts dwelling in the world, in the midst of daily trials and we turn them toward something greater. Out of self and into God. The repetition of such a sentiment on a regular basis is one reason that worship is good for you. When you say "We lift our hearts to God," it becomes engrained in your mind and in your being. The more time that you spend lifted out of the ordinary and rooted in the glorious the more uplifted you become.

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A couple of weeks ago, I heard a wonderful talk at a United Way breakfast. Claire Gaudiani is the former President of Connecticut College and many other things, including author. Her book *Daughters of the Declaration* is the history of America's unique three legged stool of success; a market economy, representative democracy, and a social profit sector. That last one, the social profit sector is one of the factors that make Americans truly unique. The values and fabric of American culture were woven together and passed on through social institutions, benevolence societies, charities, almost all created by women. They became the means for social well-being in our young country. Dr. Gaudiani refers to the founding document, the Declaration of Independence as a creed. "All men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...

These ideals were revolutionary and this document *lifted* them up as a rallying cry against tyranny and a blueprint for a new nation. It was a covenant amongst the people and like all covenants it was sealed with a promise. How many of you know the last sentence of the Declaration? "And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Think of what these framers *lifted up*. Think of the legacy of virtues, sacrifice and responsibility to others in that document and what it stood for. The ideas contained therein were those of Aristotle and the Enlightenment thinkers, Montesquieu and Montaigne. Humankind was emerging from the long held assumption that people needed to be ruled by kings and emperors because they had no capacity for self-restraint or virtue. The Enlightenment saw humanity differently, lifting up the capacity for virtue in all people, not merely the aristocracy. The Declaration of Independence lifted up the Enlightenment virtues of courage, self-restraint, generosity, sociability, justice, prudence, and wisdom for the founding of a nation – a bold experiment. But perhaps most importantly, in that last sentence the framers made it clear that with great freedom comes great responsibility for the well-being of ones fellow citizens. This is the legacy of virtue left to us by the founders of our nation. They lifted up all that they knew to be good and true, signed their names to it, and then they defended it with their lives.

Today in Trinity Church, we lift up the legacies left to us by those who have sat in these same pews and prayed the same prayers, knelt at the same altar. Eli Goodrich, Mary Bartholomew, Florence and Vernal Bates, Mabel Shepard. These are all people who loved this church and what it meant to them. As they prepared their wills, they lifted up Trinity and the virtues that they found here and said, I want to continue to help lift up and perpetuate such virtues.

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So today, within The Trinity Endowment Fund, there is the Eli Goodrich Fund. He gave two houses to the church back in the late 1800s and the proceeds from their sale were to go for the purpose of helping those within the Trinity community who might need a hand from time to time. The Florence and Vernal Bates Fund has that same focus but is also broader in scope – to help those in the Branford Community. Mabel Shepard left her entire estate to Trinity to create a scholarship fund. With every scholarship we grant, Mabel's passion for education and her generosity are lifted up.

Ralph and Ruth Dese made a truly generous gift while they were still around to see it put to work, it was a living legacy. The Dese Fund has been used to fund projects that fall outside the annual budget, like the search process for a new rector or the restoration of this wonderful church. Their generosity made it possible for us to paint the church last year without having to ask you for a penny. Thank you, Ralph and Ruth.

Another living legacy fund from The Crossleys is there for emergency building repairs. Trust me. The old girl comes up with a few of those! What a blessing to have it when we need it.

All of these people lifted up some aspect of the life of this congregation, some virtue, providing help when it is needed, supporting young people on their journeys. And in so doing, their memory and love for this community stays with us.

As we launch the new Trinity Legacy Society today, we begin to do for future congregations what has been done for us. We want to continue lifting up Trinity on the Branford Green and its vital part of God's mission in the world. We want to continue lifting up the virtues of radical welcome, generosity, joy, and compassion that defines our community here. We want to continue lifting up what is good and right here on earth as evidence of God's abiding love for all Creation. We want to lift up our hearts to God and remember that just as Jesus ascended back into union with God so are we all here at Trinity united in love and the future to which God calls us.

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