

Delivered at St James' Cathedral, South Bend on the ordination of my friend Anne Wietstock to the diaconate, December 22, 2012 by the Rev Matthew Cowden

I bring you the gift of laughter

Knock Knock (Congregation: Who's there?)

Doris (Door is closed, that's why I'm knocking)

Max (makes no diff open the door)

Celeste (Sa last time I'll ask...)

Jesus (How soon they forget, eh?)

She took a long, dangerous journey, and traveled a winding road to see Elizabeth, Mary filled with worries about being so young, so unmarried, as well as all the usual and normal anxieties that come with a first pregnancy. Filled with tension and anxiety and hope and aching muscles...they see each other...

And upon arriving, they laugh

Elizabeth: first human witness to good news, the annunciation

God's sure sign that he can and will work through the least we expect among us and that age, either the very young or the very aged, man or woman, are fair game when God wants to take action in the world.

Today the newest deacon will greet the oldest deacon at the peace, and something of the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth will be there.

So watch out: could Deacon Joe pregnant?

Anne, you have been pregnant with your call to the diaconate a long time and new birth in your ministry is almost here. But what does the unexpectedness of Mary and Eliz laughter and story sharing on that dusty front porch have to do with the birth of a new deacon?

FEAST of FOOLS: a history lesson, the youngest chosen to sit in the bishop's throne, all upended for a day, food and fun and properly mocking powers relieves the tension and the humor, as Ed Friedman reminds us, makes room for the serious work to be done.

And we see it in Philippians: Though he was at the top of the ladder, he didn't exploit his power from there, but humbled himself to upend the power dynamic, and humbled himself

Upended power is a deacon's power

You are called to holiness. We all are, but your charism and character and practice as of today marks you as one among us whose job it is to pursue it in your ministry to those most in need, those who need a help with their voice in the church and community, those marginalized, the least the lost

The laity are primarily in their ministry active in the world, priests and bishops active in the institution of the church, **deacons are the intentional bridge** between the two, deacons stand in the in between place, the threshold, the opening, the liminal place, bringing the needs of the world to the doors and through the doors of the church, and galvanizing the church's response to the world

Like Venerable Dcn Sarah Tracy who founded St Margaret's House, day shelter for women, founding, creating, and literally holding the door open for those most in need

If the church finds its model in Mary, then those who are ordered ministers, the ordained, have even more reason to find their model in Mary. And a deacon in ways particular to her, carries Mary's willingness to let God work through the least in surprising and even subversive ways.

Charge: talk about your ministry as a school nurse in your annual report, a deacon is not a deacon just in a collar or on Sundays, a deacon is a deacon everywhere, once and for always.

God of Anne Wietstock on her deaconing day
May she like mary continue to say
for this your favor to me I rejoice
And those on the margins I will still give them voice

With Gospel book held high and her head it bowed low,
Carrying on the spirit of dear deacon Joe
The words of our savior to all she'll proclaim
While binding up injuries in the sick and the lame

God of Anne Wietsock who has answered the call
Trusting your promise, giving her all
A Deacon like Stephen and Phoebe she'll be
Serving and helping us all home to thee.

We know who will be standing on the threshold holding the door,
Anne who will be as Jesus the servant

Knock Knock

We know who's there