

Rite 13 Celebration
Psalm 139
May 4, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

A Song from an Unknown Psalmist:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Today, we are celebrating an important passage in the lives of some of our young parishioners. Today, we mark the beginning of their journey to adulthood—a journey that will lead them into an ever-widening world. At our 10:30 service, we will hold what our church calls a Rite 13 ceremony—a ceremony that recognizes that one of the important gifts of adulthood is a share of God’s creative power, “the power not only to create new life, but also to shape the world according to God’s purpose.”

You can imagine I’ve spent considerable time this week weighing the words I will say to them, asking myself, “What are the most important things I can say to these young women crossing over to adulthood?” As I wrestled with that question, I sat with the psalm selected for the Rite 13 ceremony—psalm 139. It is one of my favorites.

Again and again, I read the translation they selected. I let the words wash over me—

- *You have searched me and known me
- *You find me on the journey and guide my steps
- *You know my strengths and my weaknesses
- *Even before words rise up in prayer/Lo, You have already heard my heart call.
- *Your love will embrace me everywhere
- *At all times you are with me

As those words lingered in my heart, I began to wonder about the psalmist. I began to wonder what of Jade and Kaitlyn and Megan and Sarita was in her—and what of her was in them. I began to wonder what was her story? What were the calls of her heart? What was her journey like? How did she get so close to God?

Was she a child of Jerusalem? Did she like Megan grow up in the shadow of the temple? Was it there that she grew close to God? Perhaps. Was she one of the ones on the sidelines—ignored, passed by, shunned maybe? Did she, like Sarita, stand with those others overlooked? Did she, like Sarita, have a heart that calls for justice? I wonder.

Perhaps she was a child of the exile. Perhaps she fled Jerusalem. Perhaps she sat with the women on the banks of the river Babylon and wept. Perhaps she heard their stories and made them her own. Perhaps she heard their cries and made them her own as well.

I imagine she was the pensive sort—taking time just to think. I bet she wandered off on her own from time to time—remember what she said, “You find me on the journey and guide my steps.” These are the words of someone who’s not afraid to try a different path.

She must have been the candid type—forthright, like Kaitlyn—someone who had a good sense of herself, someone not afraid to look her weaknesses as well as her strengths.

She knew darkness—that’s for sure. Was it the darkness of fear or was it the darkness of doubt?

I know there’s poet in her—who but a poet would think of soaring on the wings of the morning! In that she reminds me of Jade.

What can we know for sure about her? Not much. All that we need. She knew God. She loved God. And knew herself as beloved of God.

What can I say to the young women whose journeys we celebrate today? What can I say that the psalmist has not already said?

Instead, let me offer a prayer—a prayer for Kaitlyn and Jade and Megan and Sarita—and a prayer for all of us as well.

O Holy One,
Look with favor on these your children.
Walk with them in paths untravelled.
Bring them to resting places where they can grow to know you better.
Accompany them in the journey of their lives.
Teach them to soar on the wings of the morning.
Teach them to dwell in the depths of the sea.
Delight with them in the wanderings of their mind.
Teach them to welcome the darkness of doubt
For in darkness your light shines bright.
Assure them that periods of doubt are part of a life of faith.

Loving God,
Treasure these your servants.
Lead them to see the gifts you have given them—
Their courage, their passion, their forthrightness.
Nurture them as they grow in knowledge of their gifts.
Free them to try their hand at that which stirs their interests.
When they fall, as fall they likely will,
Fill them with the knowledge that you are with them always.
Enlighten them, that they become beacons of your light and love. **Amen.**