

The Rev. Jane Soyster Gould

Almost a decade ago I sat at the national student gathering during an ice storm in the mountains of North Carolina, captivated by the Most Rev. Desmond Tutu. Bishop Desmond gathered the crowd with his eyes and said “Christ needs you... and you... and you... and you” as he pointed at one student after another. The intensity of his gaze and the simplicity of his call left little doubt that we all are called to the work of the kingdom.

Jesus entrusted his mission to his followers. “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.” While we may fear that they and we are insufficient, Jesus voiced no such reservation. He trusted that God would make all things new if we bring who we are and what we have to the work of the kingdom. He saw no need to pray for our success; rather he prayed for our safety and our unity.

Whether we look to the Corinthian Church of the first century or our church today, we see our tendencies to trust in our own capabilities rather than to find safety in the name of God, and to fracture and divide ourselves over issues of human power. Paul reminds the Corinthians and us that “we were all baptized into one body” and that the gifts brought by each member are essential to the working of the body.

Last Sunday, my parish held a community cookout after church. Our English and Kiswahili congregation members were joined by families of neighborhood children who attended our summer program, Kids in Community, as well as folks who simply needed some food and fellowship. As burgers cooked, kids created art and adults talked in a variety of languages. A lay leader of our East African Outreach Ministry, a Kenyan immigrant, engaged me in conversation. The state of the church worries him. A few weeks ago one of my colleagues in Massachusetts received appointment as Suffragan Bishop of Nairobi to minister to African Anglicans in the United States. For five years, our Kiswahili congregation has gathered East African immigrants for worship, study and fellowship; we celebrate festival days together; our children attend a single Church School and go to Barbara Harris Camp in the summer; we support HIV/AIDS work in the Diocese of Mount Kenya South from which many of our parishioners come; we work together on immigration and employment issues. Beneath all our talk, my friend wanted to know whether the Episcopal Church planned to throw them out. I assured him that we will continue to embody the Anglican Communion as we do the work of the kingdom together.

This summer I participated in a short mission trip with some of our teenagers. We traveled to the Hudson Valley in New York to learn about issues confronting farm workers with the youth leadership group of Rural and Migrant Ministries and a group of New York American Baptists. Rural, urban and suburban... documented and undocumented... first language Spanish and monolingual English, we learned; we played; we talked; we prayed; we made art; we formed a community. We became the body of Christ.

I have no doubt that Christ calls us into community to be healers and reconcilers committed to God’s work of justice and peace. God invites each of us to join in the work of the kingdom breaking down barriers and welcoming all into the body of Christ. Each week at St. Stephen’s as we gather cradle Anglicans from the US, Africa and the Caribbean with a host of others who hear our invitation of Christ-like hospitality, we experience a taste of the kingdom. In October a Christian college, Episcopal congregations of all stripes, and several evangelical congregations and organizations will cosponsor our conference on the Millennium Development Goals. For Kenyans *harambe* is “coming together for positive purpose.” *Harambe* is the work of the kingdom.