

**29 April 2009**  
**The Rev. Deacon Annie Fritschner**  
**2 Easter**  
**Acts 4:32-35**  
**Psalm 133**  
**1 John 1:1-2:2**  
**John 20:19-31**  
**Called to Be Courageous**

*On Easter in 1962, a young white Harvard student, Jonathan Daniels, attended an Episcopal church in Boston and had a conversion experience. He had lost his faith for a time because his younger sister had been very ill and his father had died.*

*But that Easter day he felt his doubt being replaced with a renewed conviction that he was being called to serve God.*

*Soon after, he left Harvard and a prestigious scholarship, worked for a year to get his family's finances straightened out, and went to seminary in Boston.*

*As many of you remember, the 60s were a time of great social unrest. President Kennedy summed up the situation in 1963:*

*"It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstration in the street. It ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.*

*It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case today."*

*Two years later when the civil rights movement was not going very well , Dr. Martin Luther King invited students and clergy people from the North to come to the segregated South to participate in actions protesting the state of southern blacks; Jim Crow laws were still in force with separate systems for blacks and whites; whites only drinking fountains - "whites only" everythings -- were common and blacks could be taxed exorbitant amounts to register to vote; they were also killed for trying to register.*

*Jonathan believed deep in his heart that this treatment of humans was wrong, and he left seminary his senior year to go to Selma to help his black brothers and sisters. Jonathan was called by God to help create the community so clearly described in Acts this morning; a community where all who believed were of one heart and soul and where there was not a needy person among them. Many people like Jonathan responded to King's call - to God's call made through Dr. King's words.*

*On a hot, steamy Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> in August 1965 Jonathan and 22 others went to the town of Fort Deposit Alabama to picket three whites-only stores. On the next day they were arrested for participating in a voter rights demonstration. They were transferred to the county jail in nearby Hayneville and spent Easter there. After being released they had no transportation back to home, so Jonathan and three others – a Catholic priest, and two black teenagers, Joyce Bailey and Ruby Sales--went down the street to get a cold soft drink at Varner's Grocery Store, one of the few stores in Hayneville that would serve Negroes.*

*They were met outside the store by Tom Coleman, a white construction worker and part-time deputy sheriff. Coleman aimed his shotgun at sixteen year old Ruby Sales; Daniels pushed her to the ground, saving her life.*

*Coleman fired, killing Jonathan instantly.*

*Despite Ruby's eyewitness testimony, Coleman was acquitted by a jury of 12 white men, but the outcome of the trial led to reform of the segregated procedures that were used to pick juries in Alabama.*

*Not long before his death Daniels wrote:*

*"I lost fear in the black belt when I began to know in my bones and sinews that I had been truly baptized into the Lord's death and Resurrection, that in the only sense that really matters I am already dead, and my life is hid with Christ in God....As Judy (his Episcopal Theological Seminary companion) and I said the daily offices day by day, we became more and more aware of the living reality of the invisible "communion of saints"--of the beloved community in Cambridge who were saying the offices too, of the ones gathered around a near-distant throne in heaven--who blend with theirs our faltering songs of prayer and praise. With them, with black men and white men, with all of life, in Him Whose Name is above all the names that the races and nations shout, whose Name is Itself the Song Which fulfils and "ends" all songs, we are indelibly, unspeakably ONE."*

*The words in Jonathan's diary and the words in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles are as vibrant now as they were in 1965 and in 65...and they will be in 2065.*

*The simple movement of Jonathan's arm - pushed open the locked door of fear experienced by the apostles the day after Easter.....They are hiding and afraid. But Jesus loved them dearly so the risen Christ reveals himself to them, his intimate friends, and they rejoice. I think their response was probably more than just "Phew - thank God Jesus is back to lead us." I think it was that deep relief we feel when we really don't know what to do or where to turn or whom to trust and God comes to us.*

*Rejoicing with relief and thanksgiving, the apostles are given the gift of the Holy Spirit - Jesus breathes on them.*

*But the gift of the Holy Spirit isn't just for them in the room to keep to themselves - Jesus invokes the name of his father and prefaces his gift of the spirit with the news that they are to go out - to go forth. "As the father has sent me, so I send you." He tells them the gift of the Holy Spirit is one not just to accept but to share with others.*

*The apostle Thomas wasn't present that day, and as great as the news is when the apostles share it with him, Thomas is not convinced. So Jesus returns and invites Thomas to touch him so that Thomas may be convinced of the truth. God certainly is big enough to handle our needs to see and feel and touch and experience and I don't think he is upset that Thomas needed to touch to believe.*

*Now in the church where I grew up, I knew Thomas as "Doubting Thomas"; someone who had to see and touch in order to believe.*

*But in the Eastern Church, Thomas is known as "Believing Thomas", because he is the first person to declare the two natures of Jesus after Jesus' resurrection: my Lord (a reference to his humanity) and my God (the reference to Jesus' divinity. He touches Jesus and knows him as the risen Lord, and is so filled with the Holy Spirit he feels sent forth to southern India to begin Christian communities there. He writes a Gospel of Jesus' sayings one of which I want to share with you: (In Verse 3), Jesus says:*

*...the Kingdom of God is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons (and daughters - my edit) of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty, and it is you who are that poverty.*

*Believing Thomas and his fellow apostles were transformed from a community of fearing people to disciples who declared the Gospel and the true vision of Jesus throughout the world. Jonathan Daniels was a believing Thomas too. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on him one Easter morning 44 years ago, and he followed the call to the deepest part of the segregated south, in order to declare God's kingdom among people who were despised because of their skin color.*

*Let us not dwell in the poverty of living without the knowledge of God. The resurrected Jesus, God divine, who knows the fears and complications and barriers and costs to creating the kingdom on this earth called Jonathan, Thomas, you and me to create a wide community of believers who are of one heart and one soul and where there no needy persons among us. Jesus is breathing on us too, that we may go forth to serve with gladness and singleness of heart.  
Amen.*

## **JONATHAN MYRICK DANIELS**

*Jonathan Daniels was born in Keene, New Hampshire. After high school, he enrolled at Virginia Military, where at first he seemed a misfit, but in his role as reporter and editor, he attacked the inhumane treatment of freshmen and the arbitrary rules of the college. He was elected Valedictorian of his graduating class. During his sophomore year at VMI, however, he began to experience uncertainties about his religious faith and his vocation to the priesthood.*

*In the fall of 1961, entered Harvard University (to which he had won a Woodrow Wilson fellowship) to study English Literature. On 1 November 1961 the Interstate Commerce Commission, at the request of Robert Kennedy, issued rules prohibiting segregated travel on buses.*

*In the spring of 1962, Daniels was attending an Easter service at the Church of the Advent in Boston, and felt his doubt disappear, to be replaced with a renewed conviction that he was being called to serve God; he underwent a conversion experience and renewal of grace. Soon after, he made a definite decision to study for the priesthood.*

*Responding to the call to serve God, Jonathan enrolled at the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the fall of 1963, a time in which the civil rights movement had become the central issue of the country. Jonathan, in fact, joined the NAACP in 1963 while at the seminary.*

*Working with the poor and disadvantaged in South Providence gave him the opportunity to formulate and to put into action a concept of Christianity which involved social change, and a deep commitment to social justice.*

*In March 1965 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, asked students and northern clergy to join him in Selma, Alabama, for a march to the state capital in Montgomery demonstrating support for civil rights. News of the request reached the campus of ETS on*

*Monday 8 March and during Evening Prayer at the chapel, Jon Daniels decided that he ought to go.*

*Daniels wrote: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior." I had come to Evening Prayer as usual that evening, and as usual I was singing the Magnificat with the special love and reverence I have always felt for Mary's glad song. "He hath showed strength with his arm." As the lovely hymn of the God-bearer continued, I found myself peculiarly alert, suddenly straining toward the decisive, luminous, Spirit-filled "moment" that would, in retrospect, remind me of others--particularly one at Easter three years ago. Then it came. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things." I knew then that I must go to Selma."*

*Daniels and several other seminary students left for Alabama on Thursday the 11<sup>th</sup>, and had intended to only stay the weekend, but Daniels and friend Judith Upham missed the bus home. Forced to stay a little longer, Daniels and Upham realized how badly it must appear to the native civil rights workers that they were only willing to stay a few days. Convinced they should stay longer, the two went back to school just long enough to request permission to spend the rest of the semester in Selma, studying on their own and returning at the end of the term in May to take exams.*

*He returned to Selma in July where he helped to produce a listing of local, state, and federal agencies and other resources legally available to persons in need of assistance. He also tutored children, helped poor locals apply for aid, and worked to register voters. Jonathan played a central role in the integration of the Episcopal Church of Alabama, and worked with Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee members to register black voters and to protest discriminatory treatment.*

*In Selma, many proposed marches were blocked by rows of policemen. Jon describes one such meeting;  
"After a week-long, rain-soaked vigil, we still stood face to face with the Selma police. I stood, for a change, in the front rank,*

*ankle-deep in an enormous puddle. To my immediate right were high school students, for the most part, and further to the right were a swarm of clergymen. My end of the line surged forward at one point, led by a militant Episcopal priest whose temper (as usual) was at combustion-point. Thus I found myself only inches from a young policeman. The air crackled with tension and open hostility. Emma Jean, a sophomore in the Negro high school, called my name from behind. I reached back for her hand to bring her up to the front rank, but she did not see. Again she asked me to come back. My determination had become infectiously savage, and I insisted that she come forward--I would not retreat! Again I reached for her hand and pulled her forward. The young policeman spoke: "You're dragging her through the puddle. You ought to be ashamed for treating a girl like that." Flushing--I had forgotten the puddle--I snarled something at him about whose-fault-it-really-was, that managed to be both defensive and self-righteous. We matched baleful glances and then both looked away. And then came a moment of shattering internal quiet, in which I felt shame, indeed, and a kind of reluctant love for the young policeman. I apologized to Emma Jean. And then it occurred to me to apologize to *him* and to thank him. Though he looked away in contempt--I was not altogether sure I blamed him--I had received a blessing I would not forget. Before long the kids were singing, "I love ---." One of my friends asked [the young policeman] for his name. His name was Charlie. When we sang for him, he blushed and then smiled in a truly sacramental mixture of embarrassment and pleasure and shyness. Soon the young policeman looked relaxed, we all lit cigarettes (in a couple of instances, from a common match, and small groups of kids and policemen clustered to joke or talk cautiously about the situation. It was thus a shock later to look across the rank at the clergymen and their opposites, who glared across a still unbroken "Wall" in what appeared to be silent hatred. Had I been freely arranging the order for Evening Prayer that night, I think I might have followed the General Confession directly with the General Thanksgiving--or perhaps the Te Deum."*

*Jon devoted many of his Sundays in Selma to bringing small groups of Negroes, mostly high school students, to church with*

*him in an effort to integrate the local Episcopal Church. They were seated but scowled at. Many parishioners openly resented their presence, and put their pastor squarely in the middle. (He was integrationist enough to risk his job by accommodating Jon's group as far as he did, but not integrationist enough to satisfy Jon.)*

*On Friday 13 August Jon and others went to the town of Fort Deposit to join in picketing three whites-only stores. On Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> Daniels and 22 others were arrested for participating in a voter rights demonstration in Fort Deposit, Alabama, and transferred to the county jail in nearby Hayneville. They were released on August 20, 2 days after Easter, but they had no transportation back to Fort Deposit. So the bulk of the group waited by the jail and Jonathan with three others – Richard Morrisroe, a Catholic priest, and two black teenagers, Joyce Bailey and Ruby Sales--went down the street to get a cold soft drink at Varner's Grocery Store, one of the few local stores that would serve blacks.*

*They were met on the steps by Tom Coleman, a construction worker and part-time deputy sheriff, who was carrying a shotgun. Coleman aimed his gun at sixteen year old Ruby Sales; Daniels pushed her to the ground in order to protect her, saving her life.*

*The shotgun blast killed Daniels instantly; Father Morrisroe grabbed the other protester and ran. Coleman shot Morrisroe, wounding him in the lower back.*

*Ruby Sales was so traumatized by Jonathan's death that she was unable to properly speak for the next seven months. Despite death threats made to her and her family, she resolved to testify at Tom Coleman's trial. He was acquitted by the jury of 12 white men, but the outcome of the trial led to reform of the segregated procedures that were used to pick juries in Alabama*

*Not long before his death Jonathan wrote:*

*"I lost fear in the black belt when I began to know in my bones and sinews that I had been truly baptized into the Lord's death*

*and Resurrection, that in the only sense that really matters I am already dead, and my life is hid with Christ in God... As Judy (his theological school companion) and I said the daily offices day by day, we became more and more aware of the living reality of the invisible "communion of saints"--of the beloved community in Cambridge who were saying the offices too, of the ones gathered around a near-distant throne in heaven--who blend with theirs our faltering songs of prayer and praise. With them, with black men and white men, with all of life, in Him Whose Name is above all the names that the races and nations shout, whose Name is Itself the Song Which fulfils and "ends" all songs, we are indelibly, unspeakably ONE."*

*The murder of an educated, white, priest-in-training who was defending an unarmed teenage girl helped shock the Episcopal Church into facing the reality of racial inequality that it had tacitly participated in and continued. Daniels' death helped put civil rights on the map as a goal for the church as a whole, and reminded many upper class white Episcopalians that this struggle was not nearly so distant as they had imagined it to be.*

*When he heard of the tragedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "One of the most heroic Christian deeds of which I have heard in my entire ministry was performed by Jonathan Daniels."*

*Ruby Sales went onto Episcopal Seminary. She spoke years later about Jonathan:*

*"[Jonathan] set out to Alabama and became part of a beloved community of ordinary people. That day when we went to jail, in the face of baseball bats and guns, we had an opportunity to understand; that jail became a transformed space, from a place where cronies went, a space of great oppression, to a space of liberation.*

*"Jonathan learned new things about theology; he learned what it meant to stand up and say, 'I love everybody, and you can't make me hate you in my heart. Jonathan was right, the movement continues, the long distance runners who say they are still running for justice and sure aren't tired yet."*

***Civil Rights Announcement by President John F. Kennedy; June 11, 1963***

***“This afternoon, following a series of threats and defiant statements, the presence of Alabama National Guardsmen was required on the University of Alabama to carry out the final and unequivocal order of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Alabama. This order called for the admission of two clearly qualified young Alabama residents who happen to have been born Negro.***

***That they were admitted peacefully on the campus is due in good measure to the conduct of the students of the University of Alabama, who met their responsibilities in a constructive way.***

***I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.***

***Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. When Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.***

***It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstration in the street. It ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.***

***It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case today.***

*The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the nation in which he is born, has about one half as much chance of completing high school as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one third as much chance of completing college, one third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year or more, a life expectancy which is seven years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much....*

### ***Mississippi Civil Rights Workers Murders***

*Philadelphia, Mississippi was known as the site of one of the most infamous race-related crimes in American history. On June 21, 1964, three civil rights workers were murdered by white supremacists on a highway outside of Philadelphia. The crime and decades-long legal aftermath inspired the 1988 movie *Mississippi Burning*.*

*James Chaney, a local Freedom Movement activist in Meridian, Michael Schwerner, a CORE organizer from New York, and Andrew Goodman also from New York, a Freedom Summer volunteer, were lynched when they came to investigate the burning of a church that supported civil rights activity. The three men had just finished a week-long training on the campus of Western College for Women (now part of Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio) regarding strategies on how to register blacks to vote.*

*In August 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed a new Voting Rights Act that banned discrimination in voting practices and procedures on the grounds of race or color.*

*April 4, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King was shot and killed.*