

30th Anniversary Celebration of Pauli Murray's First Eucharist

"Proud Shoes To Put On"

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I stand here with what I imagine is a good deal less confidence than did the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray 30 years ago. Her 66 years that day had brought carbon steel as well as the strength and limber of bamboo out of the chapters of her life. As we stand here today, we can say with utter confidence that her life and ministry have brought many others to greater awareness, healing, and yes, even friendship, than would have been possible without her strong witness.

Mother Murray wrote of the death of her grandfather, tending his grave, and a dawning awareness of the gift his history brought her in the midst of a land of confederate veterans' graves: "for there at least at Grandfather's grave with the American flag in my hands, I could stand very tall and in proud shoes." You and I stand here today because of her dream. I know that I stand here today only because she stood here before me. Her proud shoes have carried many others down the road to freedom.

These proud shoes, and the firm footing that grounded her, are most fundamentally about knowing herself beloved. That gift of the abundant love of God made known in human flesh came to her first through a deeply-rooted and connected family. It comes to us as well through the images all around us of "God with skin on," whether those images come in family or friends or strangers. Pauli's family memory of her grandmother baptized in this place in 1854 said that yes, even that girl child owned by another was God's beloved and worthy of God's own gift and adoption. That ancient dream planted in her family and history shaped Dr. Murray's life, and her ministry both lay and ordained.

A poem of hers reflects that deeply-rooted dream: "freedom is a dream... [that] lures us down a trail of skulls where men forever crush the dreamers, never the dream... Always the dream was the same, always the dream was freedom."

That is the same dream that Isaiah dreamed three thousand years before when he said, "the spirit of the Lord is upon me, to bring good news to the oppressed, and liberty to the captives, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, to bind up the broken-hearted, and give the oil of gladness to those who mourn." It is God's dream of a reconciled world where all children can wear proud shoes that shout "beloved" and "friend" both to themselves and to everyone they meet.

That dream of freedom, of life abundant, is the dream Jesus offers the world. No one can deny you the name "beloved" once you acknowledge it. No one can take away the awareness of being God's special treasure whatever the state or condition of your life. That kind of freedom cannot be put in chains or kept in slavery; it cannot be denied or bottled up in unjust laws. That kind of freedom will emerge and find its voice as a "song in a weary throat." That dream must fly out in a song of freedom for all God's creatures.

Pauli Murray understood quite early in her life the systematic nature of all forms of oppression. She made the link between slavery, its aftermath, and the ongoing oppression of women as she struggled to study in institutions of higher education closed to her because of her race or her gender. She made the connections to treatment of Asian immigrants and Asian-Americans when she worked in California, and she saw the same attitudes as Jews cried out to leave Europe and immigrate here in the late 1930s. She understood the kind of attitudes that today seek to shut out immigrants from countries to the south of us, the kind of attitudes that still cry out, "other" "unclean" "unwanted."

In a letter to Philip Randolph in 1963 she was explicit about the radical call of freedom she heard: "The time has come to say to you quite candidly, Mr. Randolph, that 'tokenism' is as offensive when applied to women as when

applied to Negroes, and that I have not devoted the greater part of my adult life to the implementation of human rights to now condone any policy which is not inclusive."

That dream of freedom has not yet been realized, in any community in this land or across the globe. As long as any of us is restrained by custom, law, prejudice, or bigotry, we all remain in chains. Our labors in this church continue to sing of hope for the full flourishing of all God's children, black, white, Native, Asian, women, men, gay and straight, differently abled and full and able-bodied. We still yearn for the realization of Paul's ancient creed, "in Christ there is neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male and female." In Christ we are all beloved, we are all wanted, we are all of infinitely precious worth.

Will you sing that song of freedom for all? Will you sing to the beloved in your backyard and across the world? Will you sing until we all wear proud shoes?

Dream the dreams of Zion and sing the songs of hope until the whole world is set free, until the whole creation once more blooms and rejoices. Dream of a world where no one goes hungry, but all gather at the feast; where no child is ignored or untaught, and all young ones are challenged and guided into maturity; where no person lives in the chains of poverty, illness, or distress, but all have opportunity to develop and use to the full the gifts God has given; dream of a world where no human being lives in squalor or want without clean water or adequate shelter, but each has access to the orchard and vineyard and garden of abundance; dream of a world where no mother brings forth children in want without the care of healing hands, and each child is welcomed with the best of healing arts and possibility. Then will our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy.

We have dreams to dream, proud shoes to put on, and work to do. May we befriend this world and lay down our lives for our six billion brothers and sisters. Our brother Jesus offered his life in that service, and our sister Pauli did as well. You and I are also God's beloved friends — can we do any less than lay down our lives for that dream of freedom?

Isaiah 61:1-4; Psalm 126; John 15:12-15