

Sheera Suner
18/11/02

**Atticus Finch's sermon when asked to preach at First Purchase M.E. Church,
after the trial of Tom Robinson**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me to deliver your sermon this Sunday.

I would like to begin by asking you this: What is courage? I know that until recently my son, Jem, thought, like all boys do at some time, that it was something to do with guns and that it was something you needed to have if you wanted to be a real man. Although his ideas of courage and bravery have changed, I hope he still agrees with the latter half of his earlier conceptions. You do need courage, not to be 'real' man, but to be a good man, or a good woman, or in fact just a good human being of any colour, race, age or sex because the sad truth is that we are afraid to go against the crowd. The courage I am talking of is not the misunderstanding of the word that involves playing with guns. The courage I am talking of is one that is needed at times not to do wrong when it is so tempting, to stand up for your beliefs when they are controversial to everyone else's, to do the right thing when others don't want it done and to speak the truth when nobody wants to hear. It is a courage Mrs Dubose had, Tom Robinson had, Jesus Christ had.

When I think of the case of Tom Robinson, a great teaching of Jesus comes to mind. Love your neighbour as you love yourself. It is a teaching that is often preached but seldom observed. It is also a teaching that condemns prejudice and one that promotes equality. We all know that this case could not have been won, even Tom. We all also know that we could have won had one thing been different; we could have won had Tom been white. Had he been white those men in the jury would have judged his case on its merits and given a fitting verdict because they would have been able to place themselves in the shoes of Tom Robinson and treat him as they would expect to be treated, with fairness. Had he been white perhaps this case would never have come to court. However, Tom should not have needed to be white to have justice served; does it not say in the Bible that we are all descended from Adam and Eve? Does this not make us all brothers? Were Tom and the people in that courtroom that day not united in their faith? What man with Christian sentiment could do what has been done to his brother? It is wrong that Tom Robinson's right to equal rights were dismissed immediately because of his colour but it is a wrong that has been done before and will be done again. The prejudice that dominated the trial is too deep set to be eradicated easily.

It cannot be eradicated easily but it can be eradicated, and one day that wrong will not be done. Tom Robinson had the courage to speak the truth even though he knew that he could not affect the consequences of the lie. Telling the truth did not save him but it awakened the conscience of the jury as to the injustice about to be done.

There are laws in this state and others whose only purpose is to intimidate one race and set another race above them. They are wrong, hateful, petty and arrogant laws. I know many white people that are shamed by them because record of them will remain for a long time as evidence of wrong that could be done by their race. They were first put in place as a means of continuing the old ways and because of re-

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sentment felt at defeat. Defeat often breeds resentment and unjust defeat even more so. I know I resented the fact that an innocent man cannot receive justice in a court of law. I suspect that there are amongst you many resentful of the unfairness of Tom's trial and of the unfairness faced everyday. It is hard to keep functioning when times are trying and you are feeling a conflict of emotions but I ask you to take the example of Jesus Christ. He was brave enough to carry His cross so that people He loved could carry on and survive. Tom Robinson followed in His footsteps and told the truth so that one day, when the southern conscience can not turn a blind eye to such misdeeds anymore, a black person may claim equal rights to a white person and the prejudice that determined the result of this trial won't exist any more in our law courts. We must carry on with life regardless of what hardships we encounter for the sake of those around us and for the sake of future generations.

Again I thank you and Reverend Sykes for inviting me to join your service today.