

Immanuel United Church  
1st Lenten Sunday, Feb 21, 2021

Introduction to International Decade for People of African Descent

Prelude

Welcome

Lenten Introit: VU 113 *To the Desert Jesus Came*

Introduction to the theme of Lent 2021:

**The Hill We Climb — Exploring Black History**

“I can’t breathe”, the last words of Eric Garner...

Black Lives Matter, the call to take direct action in honour of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Jacob Blake, Walter Wallace Jr. Casey Goodson, and too many others...

The history making moment of Kamala Harris sworn in as US vice-president...

Youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman’s “The Hill We Climb”, herself representing “the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother who dreamed of becoming president”...

Is this just Black American History being made by our neighbours to the south?

How shall we, Immanuel, take the call to racial justice to the heart of our individual lives and to the pulse of our congregational journey?

We invite the Immanuel family and our friends to reflect upon living up to this hope in our own time and place. In her Inauguration poem, Amanda Gorman called us to the vision of Micah 4:4.

“Scripture tells us to envision  
that everyone shall sit under their own vine  
and fig tree  
and no one shall make them afraid.  
If we’re to live up to our own time,  
then victory won’t lie in the blade.  
But in all the bridges we’ve made,  
that is the promise to glade,  
the hill we climb.”



Each Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday, and for 2021 it is on Feb 17th. Black History Month has officially been recognized in Canada since 1996. We, at Immanuel United Church, believe this is finally the right time for us to honour the contributions and struggles of people of African descent.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has declared 2015–2024 to be the International Decade for People of African Descent. This means we still have 3 years to participate in this declaration to uphold this important call for God's transforming justice.

In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing "that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected." As people of faith, we know all humanity is a reflection, an embodied wisdom, of the power of God, and yet all of our collective humanity has been diminished and ruptured through the enslavement of African peoples and the colonization and exploitation of the lands of those same peoples. Chinua Achebe shares the African proverb that states, "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." It is important for people of African descent to tell their/our own truths, stories and histories. It is important for all of us to protect and preserve, to celebrate and enjoy the wisdom and beauty of God in our siblings of African descent, and by doing so, know God and ourselves in a deeper way." *Ashe*.

**Video: UN Decade for African Descent**

<https://youtu.be/hFkQdEQ1BxA>

We at Immanuel will have an opportunity to begin this journey of learning through Lent with humility, openness and truth, and by acknowledging our limits before we reflect and lament: We probably will not have any one from the black community worshipping with us through Lent. And so we will miss the opportunity of their sharing their truth so we can learn from them. Unfortunately, as of Feb 17th, 2021, there is no Black person who is an identified member in our midst who could share truth from the Black perspective. We acknowledge that this lack of representation at Immanuel is symbolic of who we are and where we have been.

We are grateful that the United Church of Canada offers a great wealth of worship resources, especially music, prayers and reflections, to share during worship. They are written by Black authors, many of whom are leaders in the United Church of Canada.

Today's worship is inspired by **2019 Black History Month: International Decade for People of African Descent (32.59 KB)**: A service of Word and Sacrament from The United Church of Canada / United Church of Christ

**Call to Worship:**            *adapted from Psalm 46*

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth has changed; though the world has changed; though our lives have been shaped by history out of our control and by present realities that threaten us.

**There is a river whose streams make glad, the diaspora of God. God is in her midst.**

**They shall not be moved. God will be present to help wherever morning dawns.**

### **Lighting the Christ Candle**

**Prayer**    *(based on A Song of Faith)*    *Dr. Alydia Smith*

Today in our worship,

we recognize people of African Descent and lament anti-Black racism and violence.

We pray that the Spirit will reorient us:

**challenging us to live by grace rather than entitlement;**

**expecting us to be a blessing to the earth.**

We pray that by acknowledging our brokenness, we will be closer to becoming a church where the good news is lived out:

**faith nurtured and hearts comforted,**

**gifts shared for the good of all,**

**resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,**

**fierce love in the face of violence,**

**human dignity defended,**

**members of a community held and inspired by God.**

Through our tears and silent confessions, may we witness to your love and grace.

*[time of silence]*

### **Assurance of Grace:**

God is our refuge and home.

God is our strength and center.

**God is a very present help.**

**God has always been and always will be, our very present help.**

**Welcome Song/Dance: Fanga Alafia Ashe Ashe (We Come To Greet You, Ashe Ashe)**

Video # 1: <https://youtu.be/bZFbbo0ezJg>

Video # 2: <https://youtu.be/XUdQSELj1-M>

*West African Greeting Song in Yoruba*

**Alafia:** *A greeting, like hello with the meaning of “good health” or “peace” (like “shalom”). Alafia is a type of traditional welcome dance.*

**Fanga:** *A traditional welcome dance. It’s often misspelled as “funga.”*

**Ashe:** *(Pronounced “ah-shay”) The Yoruba believe “ashe” is a basic force emanating from the Creator that unites all living and non-living things. Some translate it as “amen” (although that word has more western connotations).*

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

***With my thoughts I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe  
With my words I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe  
With my heart I welcome you, Ashe, Ashe  
This welcome is the heart of God, Ashe, Ashe***

***Funga Alafia, Ashe, Ashe (4x)***

**Gospel reading:** Mark 1:9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”



**Reflection: The West African concept of “Sankofa” teaches us that it’s not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.**

Rev. Paul Walfall, one of the leading Black voices and leadership in our denomination, shares this:

“Sankofa is a symbol which comes to us from West Africa. The symbol is usually seen in the form a bird with its head turned backwards carrying an egg in its mouth. The symbol speaks about

the need to reach back into the past to get that which is important for life today. It has also been associated with the proverb which says that it is not wrong to go back for what you have forgotten. Today the Sankofa bird is a symbol for African heritage and a reminder of the rich legacy the peoples of Africa offer to the world.

Each February, we in North America acknowledge and celebrate the contribution of Black people (i.e. Africans and the African Diaspora) to the development of our society.

Yet even as we pause to do this we must acknowledge the history of Black people in our country. The reality is that being part of the British Empire, Canada was a venue for the enslavement of Black people from Africa. With slavery also came the philosophies which supported the subjugation of one race of people by another. This meant that the legacy of slavery has been racial prejudice, racial discrimination, White privilege, and White Supremacy. These are the same philosophies and mindsets which gave rise to Apartheid in South Africa and the Indian Residential Schools in Canada. And I was intrigued recently to learn of the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada and how it flourished in the west with the support of many members of the church.

History tells us that Black people have had to, and continue to, overcome these same issues of racial discrimination while eking out a life for themselves and their children on this continent. In the face of many formidable obstacles they have constantly drawn upon the resources of their heritage as a lever to move forward. This can be seen in the place that music, art, dancing, worship, community, and family hold in the lives of many Black people today. They reached back and carried with them the strength of their heritage to move forward. ...

... Black History Month in this year of contemplated changes may well be offering us a prophetic call to reach back to take with us that which is important for the future. Could those important things include our sense of mission and the understanding of who we are?

So, let us honour and celebrate the contribution of Black people to our country and our church this month. But let also be open to one of the lessons that Black heritage teaches all of us. Sankofa: it is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten." (The quote ends here.)

This time of pandemic, which has been with us for more than a year now, has not only harmed us but also taught us some things. Everyone has experienced certain and varied levels of restrictions, regardless of privilege and/or status. We have experienced what it is like to lose certain privileges and freedom such as freedom to travel, freedom to gather. We have tasted the universal human suffering of being separated, isolated, living in fear. Let us climb the hill of justice in this new season of Lent, so we may explore the contributions, celebrations and struggles of the Black peoples on this continent and in the world.

Heart to heart. Humanity to humanity. Holy ones to holy ones. Amen/Ashe.

Sharing poetry from people of African Descent along with personal testimonies can help us to reflect on how loving each other forces us to share in each other's struggles and recognize our own ignorance, bias and/or oppression. Here's the first poem in this Lenten season to share, expressing our deep gratitude and reliance on human solidarity, with trust in God's guidance and grace.

**I Can't Take Care of my Family This Way:** a music video from the Poor Peoples Campaign  
<https://art.poorpeoplescampaign.org/portfolio/cant-take-care-family-way/>

**Prayers of the People: Kumbayah**

[https://youtu.be/87BHTMtI\\_dY](https://youtu.be/87BHTMtI_dY)

*Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.*

*Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Someone need you, Lord, come by here  
Oh, Lord, come by here.*

*Now I need you, Lord, come by here  
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here  
Sinners need you, Lord, come by here  
Oh, Lord, come by here.*

*We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;  
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya;  
We are praying, Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.*

*[continue music during the spoken prayer, allowing ample space for intercessions]*

Loving God, come by us, we pray.

Come to:

The joyful ...  
The excited ...  
The grateful ...  
The scared ...  
The sad ...  
The weary ...  
The grieving ...

The distraught ...  
The broken ...

Come to us all we pray.

***Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya;  
Kum bay ya, my Lord, kum bay ya,  
O Lord, kum bay ya.***

### **Jesus's Prayer**

### **Sharing of the Peace**

*by Rev. Dr. Velda Love*

*Voice of the Diaspora:*

Who are my people?

What manner of soil gave birth to my ancestors?

When I go and search for their origins and first beginnings, will the soil receive me, welcome me, and teach me who I am?

What nation, tribe, clan, family line do I belong?

I imagine those who come with the same inquiries will fill the continent searching, seeking, asking and wanting to know ... who are my people?

Which of the 3,000 distinct ethnic groups do I belong? Which of the 2,000 plus languages do I possess in my DNA? Who are my people?

Am I Dinka, Fang, or Fulani? Am I Watutsi, Zulu or Igbo? Do I descend from the Hausa, Jukun, Kassena, Kongo, Lemba, or Nande? Perhaps my ancestors are Wolof, Xhosa, Tsongo, or Zulu. I look into my eyes and think these are Ashanti, Ewe, or Maroon eyes.

I do not yet know. But I am confident my ancestors and their DNA reside on every country on every continent on this planet. My siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and extended family are Afro-Brazilian, Afro-British, Afro-Indian, Afro-Asian, Afro-Canadian, Afro-Mexican, Afro-Barbadian, maybe Afro-Irish, Afro-French, and Afro-Arab. For it is from the African soil that the Cradle of Civilization rose.

Oh, what a day that will be when we gather for the family reunion. There will be every conceivable shade of luscious brown, black, cocoa, and mocha ready to embrace, looking for a hug, smiling and greeting with welcome home. No one will be asking, "are you my people? We will be certain we are family and we are the people we've been waiting for. Ashe

The Peace of Christ be with you

**And also with you**

Music: **Wanna Be Ready for Change to Come** (Charon Hribar, Kairos Center)  
<https://soundcloud.com/kairos-center/wanna-be-ready-for-change-to-come>

I wanna be ready for change to come  
I wanna be ready for change to come  
I wanna be ready when it comes  
Wanna be ready when it come  
I wanna be ready for change to come  
Do you wanna be ready for change to come...  
Yes I wanna be ready for change to come...  
We need to be ready for change to come...  
We better be ready for change to come...  
Yes we're gonna be ready for change to come...

Hymn: VU 333 **Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

**BENEDICTION**

In Uganda there is a saying:  
One who experiences something good must share it.  
We who have received, felt, tasted and experienced  
the good news must share it.  
Go, then, into the world  
to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
in your words, actions, and deeds.

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Exploring Black History:

2021 Lenten Journey through Sunday Worship Services

1st Sunday, Feb 21

**Introduction to International Decade for People of African Descent**

2nd Sunday, Feb 28

**The Souls of Black Folk**

3rd Sunday, March 7

**Vignettes of Canadian Black History**

4th Sunday, March 14

## **The Canadian Prairies**

5th Sunday, March 21

**How Long Will We Have To Cry?**

**A Service of Lament for Anti-Black Racism**

Passion Sunday, March 28

**A History in Song**

Easter, April 4