

Immanuel United Church, Winnipeg

3rd Lenten Sunday, March 7, 2021

Vignettes of Canadian Black History

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Prelude

Welcome

Greeting (*traditional African-American*)

God is good,
all the time.
All the time,
God is good.

Call to Worship: Rev. Thérèse Samuel (From Honouring Our Identities)

Come and hear the good news: You are God's beloved.

With you God is well pleased. Even if you are not perfect!

You are God's beloved.

God has given the rainbow as a sign;

God has promised to be with all of creation, no matter what.

So come.

In confidence and hope, come, let us worship God.

Prayer:

God of creation and covenant, of rainbows and resurrection,

You love all of creation,

and you have promised to love us.

**Not even the clouds of our carelessness or the floods of our fears
can get in the way of
your radiant, radical redemption.**

Be with us now,

as we gather to praise you, source of the love and beauty that is in us, and others.

Send your Spirit

that we might be drawn together as one, even as we honour our differences.

Give us wisdom that as the Body of Christ, we may bring healing and peace
in the world that you love so much.

Thanks be to you,

**Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter.
Amen.**

Hymn: MV 88 ***Over My Head*** (African American Spiritual)
<https://youtu.be/5wFFMTIfzLw>

- V 1. **When the storms of life are ragin' I hear music in the air.**
- V 2. **When the winds of strife are blowin'...**
- V 3. **When the tide of hate is risin'...**
- V 4. **O Jesus is a-callin'...**

Introduction to the Scripture

Scripture: John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The Anthem: ***Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*** (African-American Spiritual)

Here is the background explanation of the recorded music, from our member Rob Smith: "Swing Down Chariot is a traditional song, (rooted in Negro Spirituals). This arrangement is copyrighted by Barbershop Harmony Society and performed by Brothers in Harmony. That is the alternate name for Harlequin BSQ, a group of 4 fellows I have sung with since 1998 (almost 23 years together). Barbershop harmony is a style of singing that originated from black slave music with elements in their original African music. Black quartets were common in the USA in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 1930s the style was appropriated by white businessmen who established an organization but ironically excluded blacks. The Barbershop Harmony Society has in recent years apologized publicly for this disgrace and has honoured a black quartet excluded from the 1941 national competition."

Refrain: **Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home;
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.**

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home.

REFRAIN

If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home;
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,
Coming for to carry me home.

REFRAIN

I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down,
Coming for to carry me home;
But still my soul feels heavenly bound,
Coming for to carry me home.

REFRAIN

Vignettes of Canadian Black History

Black people have been present in the land we call Canada since long before confederation. Multilingualist Mathieu da Costa, of partial African ancestry, is the first known Black person to arrive on this land. Da Costa is understood to have spoken Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Mi'kmaq, and pidgin Basque, and because of his ability to learn new languages traveled with João Fernandes Lavrador, exploring Greenland and the north Atlantic coast of Canada as early as 1499. Additionally da Costa would voyage with Pierre Dugua de Mons and Samuel de Champlain.

We Confess Our Common Faith: A New Creed

Please join me as we share the story of our hearts (VU p. 918).

<https://youtu.be/MIOpxhVTYdw> (Maya Douglas, United Church minister, directing)

Confession

Let's pray:

Gracious God, Jesus our Anointed,

We pray for your mercy today, knowing that anything short
Of just living is not the kingdom of heaven,
The living arrangement we live and long for.
At the heart of your renewed creation
Is a quest for healthy relationships
And the building up of marginalized individuals and communities.
We ask for the courage to hear and support
The stories of racialized individuals and communities
That we might meet Jesus in the story
And be transformed.

Amen.

We Pass the Peace

The Peace of Christ be with you!

And also with your spirit.

Vignettes of Canadian Black History

The story that is dawning on the minds of more and more Canadians in recent years is that slavery connected to European colonialism existed in Canada for about 205 years. It began with the arrival of Olivier Le Jeune, an African boy from Madagascar, about 7 years old, in New France (modern-day Quebec). There is little known about Le Jeune, but he was educated by a Jesuit priest, Father Le Jeune, and upon baptism took the name Olivier after the colony's head clerk Olivier Letardif. He would later take the priest's surname. By the time Le Jeune died in May 1654, it is thought that his status had changed from slave to free domestic servant.

The Offering

We, the United Church of Canada, have made a commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination. Another way of saying this is that we are committed to developing healthy relationships with individuals and communities, especially those experiencing marginalization, because this was a focus of Jesus' redemptive work.

Thank you for being invested in this transformative work, and thank-you for being dedicated to living out this incredible vision for our community and the world. Your time, talents, and gifts make a huge difference, and we are forever grateful to see what God is doing in you and in our community.

Offering Song

"I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" https://youtu.be/_t5u3lcK1AI

Vignettes of Canadian Black History

Marie-Joseph Angélique was an enslaved woman living in what is now called "Old Montreal" in New France (modern-day Quebec). She was convicted of setting fire to her slaveholder's house and causing much of Old Montreal to burn in a chain reaction of events.

It has long been assumed that Angélique was guilty of the crime, but in more recent years historians have questioned her trial, suggesting that her conviction was based more on her reputation than on credible evidence. Angélique seems to have been viewed at the time as a rebellious “runaway slave”. Her story exposes the challenges that Blacks who longed to be free faced in the early days of Canada.

African-American spiritual: **Wade in the Water**

https://youtu.be/fxZ4H-gg_lc

Refrain: **Wade in the water**
Wade in the water children
Wade in the water
God’s gonna trouble the water.

Who’s that young girl dressed in red
Wade in the water
Must be the children that Moses led
God’s gonna trouble the water.

REFRAIN

Who’s that young girl dressed in white
Wade in the water
Must be the children of the Israelite
God’s gonna trouble the water.

REFRAIN

Who’s that young girl dressed in blue
Wade in the water
Must be the children that’s coming through
God’s gonna trouble the water.

REFRAIN

You don’t believe I’ve been redeemed
Wade in the water
Just so the whole lake goes looking for me
God’s gonna trouble the water.

REFRAIN

Sermon Brain Food *(The Rev. Debbie McMillan)*

I'm a history grad who doesn't know all my own history.

I'm biracial but I am racialized as Black.

I thought I was a Canadian, but I know and understand in my head and in my heart that I am a settler on stolen land.

So, I have questions.

How do I identify myself? To whom do I belong? Who are my people?

I am the Black great-grand-daughter of Orange Lodge members.

It was what it was in Canada.

My great-aunt—my maternal grandfather's sister—

Spoke in racial and cultural slurs about anyone not from Northern Ireland.

She used the "N" word about me before I was born.

I'm not sure if she used it after I was born because we had no relationship.

Because my grandfather learned to love me:

It took him

four weeks, three days,

and a few hours—apparently.

And he never stopped. He's dead, and I know he still loves me.

It's so easy for me to centre my Whiteness because it's what I know.

Whiteness raised me, clothed me, fed me, educated me, and taught me about Christianity.

I am learning my Black history.

I am learning Black histories.

Do you see what I did there? I turned histories into a plural

Because there is more than one.

There is more than one Black history

Because there is more than one Black person.

But

If there is one common ancestor,

It is a continent full of countries

Full of folx

It is our Mother

The Motherland

Africa.

To many of us in exile from our selves

And from our histories

She is a stranger of mythic and epic proportions.

Africa is Matriarch and her children bless the nations.

Who is Abraham?

The trunk of the tree that gives rise

To a branch of Christianity

A branch of Judaism
A branch of Islam.
Abraham is patriarch.
Childless Abraham and Childless Sarah
Receive a promise: that they will father and mother
Many nations:
Their offspring will be as numerous as stars in the sky
Or grains of sand on a seashore.
We are the grains of sand,
We are the stars.
We are their offspring. We are the children of promise.
We can look back in our sacred stories and say with certainty:
“There! There is our father! There is our mother! This is our family tree.”
We find strength in connection: strength from looking back
Which empowers us to move forward into the future.

My DNA tells stories in a language that I can't understand on my own;
I have to pay a company to decipher what is mine anyway:
To unravel the mysteries of what is in me—
In my own body that only I own—
To uncover a history that was stolen from me
When slavery stole
My ancestors from their homes.
My family and I can go as far back as Jamaica
But the branch has been cut off after that.
There is a void the size of an ocean
And as deep as a cargo hold full of human beings
Fetid and fettered
In chains
Stacked like so much cordwood on a country estate.
Africa is a backward glance over the shoulder
Then a line on the horizon.
Then a distant memory.
Then, what?
And we have kept moving forward.
We don't know villages or names.
We don't know our patriarchs and matriarchs.

The Sankofa
The bird symbol
Teaches us that there is no shame in looking back.
The Sankofa stands with her feet facing forward but her head turned back to the past
Perhaps she is reaching for the egg she hides in her wing?

Sankofa stands in the present: seeking answers from history that will lead her into the future.
Sankofa is a lesson I have learned: she is hope to me as I continue to learn my histories
As a child of the African Diaspora.

We look back to Abraham and Sarah: Patriarch and Matriarch
Learners of their purpose journeying on a road paved by God.
They thought they knew who they were—until God said, “You are more. So much more! Son
and daughter of the covenant, you are so much more.”

We, in the Abrahamic Diaspora, are covered in that covenant. We are all more: so much more
than we think we are.

Response

VU 634 *To Abraham and Sarah* (sung in the tune of VU 633)

Prayers of the People

God of Transfiguration

Your power reveals truth

In all its beauty, in all its difficulty, in all its complexity.

You embrace us in our diversities—loving us, accepting us.

We ask you to unite us through the power of your Spirit

So that we may work to manifest your presence

In creation;

Speak in our voices as we raise them in prayer.

God of Transfiguration:

Illuminate systems of exploitation and injustice:

Systems that dislocate and enslave.

Tear down the monuments we build to ourselves and for ourselves:

Cast down self-congratulatory privilege when we seek to pat ourselves on our back

When we are only doing what we should

Or when we are doing nothing and it is you at work.

Lift us out of missions that are photo-ops, and lead us into the ongoing work

Of partnership and community building.

O God, We hear your people sing and speak about their experiences of racism.

**Lead us to appreciate a culture built largely from suffering, one moving to use the strength to
share, and gaining - too gradually - respect for lives on edge.**

(Prayers our members sent in email last week.)

Most Holy God

Lead us away from the lofty places, the pretty places, the safe places
and into the streets and alleys—

Into hospital rooms with lonely patients
Into schoolyards with bullied children—
Into places we can't see because they are on the margins
But places that are known to you.
Most holy God,
We pray for those known to us...
Gather these prayers in the one Jesus taught us to say when we are together:
Our Father...

Hymn: VU 639 ***One More Step Along the World I Go***

Blessing and Sending Forth:

Look forward, look back, look outward, look within, and look around! Learn your histories: those of your family and those of your faith. As you do, remember you are a beloved child of God, a precious sibling of Christ, and a treasured companion to the Holy Spirit. Stay blessed and bless up.

African American Spiritual: I'm a Rollin' in the Unfriendly World (Bessie Jones)
<https://youtu.be/nQnTJBwv2iA>

Credits:

Today's service owes deep gratitude to the two worship resources shared and available publicly on the United Church website.

2021 Black History Month: Ancestors and Ancestry (40.77 KB): A worship service honouring the histories of our families and our faith by the Rev. Debbie McMillan.

2021 Black History Month: Honouring Our Identities (27.7 KB): See link in file for YouTube recording of service led by Rev. Thérèse Samuel with Dr. Christopher Burton and Phyllis Fleming.