



Church Anniversary

Sunday, March 11, 2011

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The unit you are viewing, Church Anniversary, is a compact unit. This means that it is not a complete commentary of the Scripture(s) selected for this day on the calendar, nor does it have a full, supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided a sermonic outline, songs, suggested books, and suggested articles, links, and videos. For additional information see Church Anniversary in the archives of the Lectionary for 2009. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Church Anniversary

Ralph Wheeler wrote in the 2009 African American Lectionary commentary for Church Anniversary:

There are numerous religious traditions and liturgical moments that exist within the African American church for which there is no clear record regarding when or how they started. Church anniversaries fall within that category. The Liturgical Moment of “Church Anniversary” is one of the high points of black church life. Yet, there is no settled record depicting when the first black church anniversary was held. In part, this could be due to the recognition that the black church in this country did not develop as a single unit.

Church anniversary is a time when the black church celebrates its past, while it thematically points to a vision of its future. Congregations utilize church anniversary celebrations to impart and reflect on their history, to reconnect with former members,

especially those who have moved away to other cities and states, and to highlight the church's central purpose in the local community and the world.

With this as our backdrop we provide a sermonic outline for a Church Anniversary.

II. Church Anniversary: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Joshua 1:3-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 3) Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. (v. 4) From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. (v. 5) No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. (v. 6) Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. (v. 7) Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

B. Possible Title(s)

- i. God's Promise to the Church
- ii. The Promise of God's Presence
- iii. God's Promise: Then and Now

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require increased exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the fact that the recently emancipated former slaves of Egypt, the Israelites, who were descendants of Jacob, are herein given a vast amount of land as their "Promised Land."

It is significant to note that a people do not really become a Nation until they have a plot of land that they can point to and declare as their homeland. The descendants of Jacob who had given up their homeland to defect into Egypt are consequently without a physical place they can call their own. God in God's providential nature grants to them an enormous amount of land, more than sufficient for them to settle and cultivate, as a physical community. This singular act alone demonstrates God's great love and compassion, as well as points to God's sense of justice and equity for the disenfranchised.

III. Introduction

One of the truly marvelous events in the life of the fellowship of the faithful is to be able to engage in a corporate celebration of the fact that our God has allowed us to approximate a

reflection of the Divine Kingdom here on earth within the Beloved Community for another year. We celebrate this during our church anniversaries.

Our faith journey is oft' times a difficult and tedious movement from "one good degree of grace to another." At best this movement is sometimes fraught with tears and troubles. At other times it is our good pleasure to serve and please God as the people of God with a spirit of unity, strength, and a peace that truly surpasses all understanding.

Our successful engagement in this sacred enterprise is not due to our intellectual ingenuity, creative capacity, or political prowess, but is accomplished solely because God's hand has blessed our meager efforts to make the Kingdom a shining reality. The inexhaustible grace of God makes our mortal failures and inadequacies sufficient to accomplish that which is admittedly humanly impossible. The glaring truth is that we must echo the report of Christ's first disciples: "When we have done all that is required of us, we are STILL unprofitable servants!" (John 17:10 NRSV).

We do not, however, tread alone inside our glaring deficiencies; God's promises are eternally true. God promised that the Divine presence would always be beside us and is given to guide us.

Moses, the Exodus General and Red Sea Navigator, is now dead. God has just pronounced the benediction at Moses' interment on the backside of Mount Horeb. In an almost imperceptible pivot, God now turns to Joshua and utters the promise that has ever been the saving Grace of all who would trust, believe, and follow the voice of our Lord: "As I was with Moses, so shall I be with thee!"

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – God blesses our courageous, faithful obedience to God's commandments.

- a. Our Church was built on biblical principles;
- b. We must trust those teachings that have sustained our congregation; and
- c. Faithfulness to Godly teachings will grant to us success.

Move/Point Two – God promises to be with us today as God was when we began our journey.

- a. God guided and blessed Moses;
- b. God has guided the Church and blessed her labors; and
- c. God will guide and bless you!

Move/Point Three – No formidable foe will deter God's people.

- a. God has not promised that there would not be challenges on our journey;

b. God has promised that no challenge will prevail against us while we remain in God's will; and

c. The promises of God are for a lifetime.

V. Celebration

Listen to God's voice as God speaks to us even now, "Every place the sole of your foot shall tread, I have given unto you!" God's promise to Israel is still God's promise to us today. We are the New Israel, the Ransomed and Redeemed Community of Faith. We are God's twice-born children. We are the Ekklesia, the called out, sanctified servants, and therefore, blessed of God to be called "the Church."

God's promise belongs to us as well! It was delivered on the Cross of Calvary. It was written with the blood of our Savior. It was sealed in the power of his resurrection. It is available to us even now!

As a child growing up, my mother taught me that the Bible is a book filled with God's promises, "but you cannot claim even one of them," she cautioned, "if you do not know them."

Rest on your feet all over the church and repeat after me, "Every place the sole of your foot shall tread God has already given it to you!"

Now lift your left foot and put it down. 'A': "Ask and it shall be given. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the door will be opened!" (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Now lift your right foot and put it down. 'B': "Be thou faithful unto death and I shall give thee a crown of life!" (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Lift your left foot and put it down. 'C': "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Lift your right foot and put it down. 'D': "Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out." (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Lift your left foot and put it down. 'E': "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you,..." (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Lift your right foot and put it down. 'F': "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious of the workers of iniquity for they shall soon be cut down!" (Every place the sole of your foot treads!)

Lift your left foot and put it down, 'G': "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!" I tell you, EVERY place the sole of your foot shall trod God has already blessed for YOU!

VI. Illustration(s)

Rerouting, Rerouting

Now, you don't have to go to a gas station to ask what is the quickest way to get from point A to point B. All you need to do is pull out your handy Global Positioning System (GPS). Plug in the address and simply follow the directions. One day as I was driving with a friend, we decided to use my GPS to get where we were going. The GPS said turn right and we turned right. The GPS said enter I-85 and we entered I-85. However, when the GPS said make a right, I was running my mouth so I did not hear the GPS correctly. Instead of making a right, I told my friend to make a left. Because we were listening to my voice and not the voice of the GPS, when we turned left, the GPS said "You are now off track." But I'm so glad the GPS did not stop there. A second later, it said, "Rerouting, rerouting." Isn't that like the GPS? I'm not referring to the Global Positioning System. I'm talking about God's Positioning System. When we get off track God starts rerouting.

—Eustacia Moffett Marshall, Charlotte, North Carolina

This illustration is taken from the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary.

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Sounds: The vocal dull roar of a very large crowd of people, crying and mourning over the death of Moses; sounds of flowing water from a river; the sound of feet walking;

Sights: The fresh grave of Moses; a mass of people with their life's belongings; goats; sheep; mountains; the forest of Lebanon; rivers; grasslands; children; carts and beasts of burden (donkeys, oxen, and horses); and

Colors: Grey, dingy white, earthy brown, green grass, and mourning black.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymns

- We've Come This Far by Faith. Words and music by Albert A. Goodson
- Renew Thy Church, Her Ministries Restore. By Kenneth L. Cober. Tune by J. T. White
- A Charge to Keep I Have. Meter Hymn. By Charles Wesley
- Great Is Thy Faithfulness. By Thomas O. Chisholm and William M. Runyan

B. Well-known Songs

- The Church's One Foundation. By Samuel J. Stone
- Lean on Me. By Kirk Franklin
- O Se Baba. Nigerian Praise Song.

C. Modern Songs (Written between 2005–2010)

- He's Able. By Darwin Hobbs
- Celebrate. By Claude Jones

D. Invitational Song

- Standing on the Promises of God. By Russell Kelso Carter

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Church Anniversary to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

“Celebrating 132 Years of Ministry at the Greater Travelers Rest Baptist Church.” A Beautiful and fun celebration of 4 Generations at Greater Travelers Rest. Online location: <http://www.blackbottom.com/watch.php?v=BdXxuqt6rtt> accessed 2 January 2010

Sign ministry praise performance:

- Lord You Are Welcome in This Place. By Bishop Clarence Mclendon. Performed by Mt. Ararat Jr. Mime. Mt. Ararat Baptist Church. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=borsUHsgOck>; For more about the mime group contact Mt. Ararat Baptist Church online location: <http://www.mtararatbaptist.com/> accessed 20 January 2010
- Nobody But You. By Norman Hutchins. Performed by Gods Hands of Praise Sign Language Choir of Detroit, Michigan, featuring “Little Symone Linson.” YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c24MyNIwxGU>

X. Books and Articles to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to a Church Anniversary

- Pinn, Anne. E., and Anthony Pinn. Fortress Introduction to Black Church History. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2001.
- Raboteau, Albert J. African-American Religion. Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

- Khan, Farah. “The Black Church in the 20th Century.” Online location: <http://dickinsg.intrasun.tcnj.edu/diaspora/church.html> accessed 10 January 2011

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Church Anniversaries and Suggestions

“Celebration stands at the very center of our lives. Sociologists as well as Christians say that it is essential to the ongoing of our lives. It not only keeps life from being hum-drum, boring, needlessly repetitive, but it enables us to discover again and again who we are, from whence we came, and what we need to be about in our daily lives. In remembering and doing the essential works of the Faith bound up in the sacraments and in the Sunday morning liturgy, we recapture the faith.” Dow, Norman. “A Number of Ways to Celebrate an Anniversary.” Centennial Celebration Committee, First Presbyterian Church. Cisco, TX. Online location: <http://synodresourcecenter.org/evang/committee/anniversary/0001/celebrate.html> accessed 2 January 2011

- Lawrence, Alexis. “Program Ideas for a Church Anniversary.” Ehow. 27 October 2010. Online location: http://www.ehow.com/way_5229720_program-ideas-church-anniversary.html accessed 5 January 2011 (Be sure not to underline the word accessed and the date accessed)
- A good example of a church anniversary program containing some of the suggestions listed above is the “Calvary Baptist Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, 113th Anniversary Program.” Online location: <http://www.calvaryslc.com/New%20Calvary/113anniv/113th%20Anniversary%20Program%20REVISED.pdf> accessed 5 January 2011

Suggestions:

- Write an historical essay for each issue of your newsletter, which can help heighten interest in the celebration.
- Write skits or plays based on historical events in the life of your church. Be sure to include all age groups in the skirts or plays.
- Write articles for the local newspaper about your church and its history. Include a few photographs. Contact the religion editor or the community events editor for assistance.
- Write a series of historical “minutes” to be presented during worship services throughout the anniversary year. They can concern events or people in the life of the church.
- Have each member, past and present, write a brief letter of appreciation on “What this church has meant to me.” Compile them in a book or in a file in your church library or archive. Plan a fellowship program and read the letters.
- Have members of the congregation, past and present, write as prayers what their wishes are for the future of the church. Perhaps these can be used to develop a mission statement

or goals for the church as it moves into the future.

- Write a brief biography of important lay leaders in the church throughout its history. Be sure to include youth leaders.
- Re-dedicate the church.
- Use church records and cultural history to create a commemorative booklet.
- Record the event using professional photographers and videographers.

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymns

- We've Come This Far by Faith. Words and music by Albert A. Goodson

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc. 2001. #412

Church of God in Christ. Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Pub. Board in association with the Benson Co., 1982. #395

- Renew Thy Church, Her Ministries Restore. By Kenneth L. Cober. Tune by J. T. White

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #343

The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. #311

- A Charge to Keep I Have. Meter Hymn. By Charles Wesley

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #467

- Great Is Thy Faithfulness. By Thomas O. Chisholm, and William M. Runyan. Performed by Alfred Street Baptist Church Bicentennial Choir. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzntMXAGTVA> accessed 2 January 2011

- Great Is Thy Faithfulness. By Thomas O. Chisholm, and William M. Runyan. Performed by Metropolitan Baptist Church choir and congregation. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kabwrNk3JAQ&feature=related> accessed 2 January 2011

- Great Is Thy Faithfulness. By Thomas O. Chisholm, and William M. Runyan. Performed by Cece Winans. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60o3UP4Kjwg&feature=related> accessed 2 January 2011

B. Well-known Songs

- The Church's One Foundation . By Samuel J. Stone

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #337

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. Nashville, TN: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, (1984) second printing 1986. #519

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #88

- Lean on Me. By Kirk Franklin. Online location:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXBKaOkmQhw> accessed 5 December 2010

- O Se Baba. Nigerian Praise Song.

Location:

Performed by Alfred Street Baptist Church Young Adult Ministry Praise Dancers. Virginia Raye, Choreographer. Online Location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErlL2OZfgo> accessed 2 January 2011

C. Modern Songs (Written between 2005–2010)

- He's Able. By Darwin Hobbs

Location:

Darwin Hobbs. Free. Indianapolis, IN: Tyscot, 2008.

- Celebrate. By Claude Jones

Location:

Longview Heights S.D.A. Sanctuary Choir. No Weapon. Memphis, TN: (Indie), 2006.
Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fcEDm2MvwQ> accessed 28 December 2010

D. Invitational Song

- Standing on the Promises of God. By Russell Kelso Carter

Location:

Promises of Perfect Love. By John Sweeney and Kelso Carter. Philadelphia, PA: John J. Hood Press, 1886.

African American Heritage Hymnal. #373

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. #424