



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, December 21, 2008

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I. Introduction

Advent is a time not only to celebrate Christ's first coming as a child in Bethlehem, but it also is an occasion to prepare for his second coming on the final day of judgment—the Day of the Lord. The “sweet, little Jesus boy” whom we worship on Christmas Day will return as the Great Judge of the universe! Thus, in preparation for Christmas, it is not enough to sing “Joy to the World.” We also must strive to embody God's profound commitment to justice. Today's lection (Malachi 4:1-6) should be taken seriously.

Malachi 4:1-6 – (v. 1) See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. (v. 2) But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

(v. 3) And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. (v. 4) Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. (v. 5) Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. (v. 6) He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

II. Remembering the Fourth Sunday of Advent

It was December 24, 2000. The first Christmas of the new millennium was almost here. But this December 24th morning was the fourth Sunday in Advent. Traditionally, the fourth Sunday of Advent focuses on Mary, the unmarried virgin and future mother of the Savior of the world. Earlier in the week at our regular staff meeting, one of the pastors made the observation that the forthcoming Sunday service would have the largest attendance of the season. “Can we give the people what they want and sing some Christmas carols?” I, the strict constructionist liturgical musician, countered with a reading of the assigned lectionary Marian scriptures. “It’s not Christmas,” I and a few in the minority pleaded. “We must wait.” After much discussion, I then suggested that we have a carol sing for fifteen to thirty minutes before the Christmas Eve night service. Surely, between the service and the carol sing, we could hit at least ten of the congregational favorites.

The latter plan was implemented. But at the morning service, much to my surprise, a guest preacher spoke to the congregation on the meaning of Advent. She went on to say how the scriptures illustrated that God had to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus. Similarly, for our annual commemoration of the birth of Jesus, we must take the time to fully prepare for his nativity. Moreover, she said, “that’s why we can’t sing those Christmas carols just yet,” as she broke into several rounds of the praise song “Let God Arise and His Enemies Be Scattered.”

Let God Arise and His Enemies Be Scattered

Let God arise and his enemies be scattered.
Let God arise and his enemies be scattered.
Let God arise and his enemies be scattered.
Let God, let God arise.

Power, power, Lord.
He's got the power
Power belongs to God.¹

III. Additional Advent Music

The scripture assigned for this Fourth Sunday of Advent reminds us that we are now in a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus. Advent is a season of waiting and preparation; Christians who wait and are prepared will be rewarded. When? According to one spiritual, “In that Great Gittin’ Up Mornin’.” In graphic detail (bleeding moons, falling stars), it makes clear that Judgment Day is coming. Another song suggests that, perhaps sooner than we think, we will be caught up to see our Savior; “soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.” This song does not apply to one particular race of people (“We have come from every nation.”); it remembers those who have “laid down their lives,” and it offers them a reward, “Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King.” Another song, which is more somber, “Soon-ah Will Be Done-ah,” is a song sung by slaves who are moaning their

way through the hardships of life while also exclaiming that liberation will come. While some claim that songs of this genre are “escapist” music, they can also be considered music that helped keep slaves sane while they waited for Jesus to return, and were also ever waiting for liberation from slave masters and slave-like conditions on earth. It was not an either/or situation; they wanted both at different times.

In Dat Great Gittin’ Up Mornin’

I’m gonna tell ya ‘bout de comin’ of de judgment,
Fare ye well, fare ye well,
I’m gonna tell ya ‘bout de comin’ of de judgment,
Fare ye well, fare ye well,

Refrain

In dat great gittin’ up mornin’, fare ye well, fare ye well,
In dat great gittin’ up mornin’, fare ye well, fare ye well.

Dere’s a bettuh day comin’, fare ye well, fare ye well,
Dere’s a bettuh day comin’, fare ye well, fare ye well,
When I see my king Jesus, fare ye well, fare ye well,
When I see my king Jesus, fare ye well, fare ye well.

Refrain

Den you’ll see de worl’ on fiah, fare ye well, fare ye well,
See de moon a-bleedin’, fare ye well, fare ye well,
See de stars a-fallin’, fare ye well, fare ye well,
Den you’ll see po’ sinners prayin’, fare ye well, fare ye well.

Refrain²

Soon And Very Soon

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we’re going to see the King.

No more cryin’ there, we are going to see the King,
No more cryin’ there, we are going to see the King,
No more cryin’ there, we are going to see the King,
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we’re going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

No more dyin’ there, we are going to see the King,
No more dyin’ there, we are going to see the King,
No more dyin’ there, we are going to see the King,
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we’re going to see the King.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.

Should there be any rivers we must cross,
Should there be any mountains we must climb;
God will supply all the strength that we need,
Give us grace 'til we reach the other side.
We have come from ev'ry nation,
God knows each of us by name;
Jesus took his blood and washed my sins,
And he washed them all away.
Yes, there are some of us who have laid down our lives,
But we all shall live again on the other side.

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Soon and very soon we are going to see the King,
Hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King.³

Soon-ah Will Be Done-ah

Refrain

Soon-ah will be done-ah with the trouble of the world,
Troubles of the world, the troubles of the world.
Soon-ah will be done-ah with the trouble of the world.
Goin' home to live with God.

Stanza 1

No more weeping and ah-wailing,
No more weeping and ah-wailing,
No more weeping and ah-wailing,
I'm goin' to live with God.

Refrain

Stanza 2

I want to meet my mother,
I want to meet my mother,
I want to meet my mother,
I'm goin' to live with God.

Refrain

Stanza 3

I want to meet King Jesus,
I want to meet King Jesus,
I want to meet King Jesus,
I'm goin' to live with God.

*Refrain*⁴

“Better Be Ready,” is an Advent song of preparation and urgency. Jesus is going to claim believers who are ready. Such readiness is achieved through a life lived according to the Fruit of the Spirit, by doing justice and loving mercy, and by loving our neighbors as ourselves. For those who earnestly desire to “be ready,” they have but to ask God to help them follow his statutes and commandments and to keep them in their hearts.

Better Be Ready

Refrain

Better be ready, better be ready;
Better be ready, ready to put on your long white robe

Stanza 1

Oh! Rise up children, get your crown;
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)
And by your Saviour’s side sit down.
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)

Refrain

Stanza 2

What a glorious morning that will be,
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)
Our friends and Jesus we shall see
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)

Refrain

Stanza 3

O shout you Christians, you’re gaining ground,
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)
We’ll shout old Satan’s kingdom down!
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)

Stanza 4

I soon shall reach that golden shore,
(Ready to put on your long white robe!)
And sing the songs we sang before
Ready to put on your long white robe!⁵

Teach Me, O Lord

Refrain

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end.

Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law;
I shall keep it with all my heart.
Make me go in the path of your commandments,

For that is my desire.

Refrain

Incline my heart to your decrees and not to unjust gain.
Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; give me life in your ways.

Refrain

Fulfill your promise to your servant,
Which you make to those who fear you.
Behold, I long for your commandments;
In your righteousness preserve my life.

*Refrain*⁶



Rev. Charles A. Tindley

We conclude our Year One Advent cultural resources with a standard of the faith, “We’ll Understand it Better By And By” written by Reverend Charles Albert Tindley (1855-1933). Pastor Tindley, a self-educated descendant of slaves, wrote forty-six hymns and became the “father of African American Hymnody.” According to Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, a member of the lectionary team, and a cultural folklorist and songwriter,

Reverend Charles Albert Tindley wrote...songs, whose themes cover much of the general Christian experience. When African Americans dip into the well of his music, we pull out those pieces that speak most strongly to our experience change and struggle as keys to service and deliverance. Tindley’s songs became an extension of the message he felt charged to give. As the Philadelphia congregation packed his services to absorb his sermons, so the larger African American community absorbed his songs. Like water in a dry land, these new songs gave musical energy to the twentieth century African American sacred experience.⁷

“We’ll Understand it Better By and By” is an Advent song that recognizes that days spent on earth while awaiting the Savior’s return can be difficult to endure, especially for those who are poor and destitute. In addition, life is filled with so many difficult experiences that cannot be understood on this side. We have to wait and “follow till we die,” but we’ll understand it all when Jesus comes, by and by.

We'll Understand It Better By and By

Stanza 1

We are tossed and driv'n on the restless sea of time;
Somber skies and howling tempests oft succeed a bright sunshine;
In that land of perfect day, when the mists have rolled away,
We will understand it better by and by.

Refrain

By and by, when the morning comes,
When the saints of God are gathered home,
We'll tell the story how we've overcome,
For we'll understand it better by and by.

Stanza 2

We are often destitute of the things that life demands,
Want of food and want of shelter, thirsty hills and barren lands;
We are trusting in the Lord, and according to God's Word,
We will understand it better by and by.

Refrain

Stanza 3

Trials dark on every hand, and we cannot understand
All the ways that God could lead us to that blessèd promised land;
But He guides us with His eye, and we'll follow till we die,
For we'll understand it better by and by.

Refrain

Stanza 4

Temptations, hidden snares often take us unawares,
And our hearts are made to bleed for a thoughtless word or deed;
And we wonder why the test when we try to do our best,
But we'll understand it better by and by.

*Refrain*⁸

Happy Advent!

Notes

1. Let God Arise and His Enemies Be Scattered. Lyrics, Psalm 68:1. Music by Kurt Carr
2. In Dat Great Gittin' Up Mornin'. U.S. slave spiritual
3. Soon and Very Soon. Lyrics and music by Andraé Crouch
4. Soon-ah Will Be Done-ah. U.S. slave spiritual
5. Better Be Ready. U.S. slave spiritual © 1936 Paul A. Schmitt Music Company. Copyright assigned to Belwin Mills

6. Teach Me, O Lord. Lyrics, Psalm 119:33-38. Music by David Hurd. ©1984 GIA Publications
7. Reagon, Bernice Johnson. We'll Understand It Better by and by: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. p. 52
8. Tindley, Charles A. "We'll Understand It Better By and By." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #418