



ARTS DAY

Sunday, May, 1, 2011

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The unit you are viewing, Arts Day, is a compact unit. This means that it is not a complete commentary of the Scripture 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 Arts Day in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008 and 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: Arts Day

Professor Johnny B. Hill wrote in the 2008 African American Lectionary commentary for Arts Day:

Throughout the history of the African American experience, the role of the artist has been indispensable to the quest for freedom and human dignity. The artist speaks to those deep and fundamental hopes, fears, and dreams of the people, while providing social critique and prophetic imagination in a world often wrought with suffering and political subjugation... From the deep and persistent echoes of spirituals during slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the emergence of jazz and bebop music in the early twentieth century, to socially conscious rap in the twentieth and twenty-first century, artistic imagination has aided black folks in their journey to lay claim to what Howard Thurman calls “somebodiness.”

Maria Mallory White wrote in the 2009 African American Lectionary commentary for Arts Day:

Arts Sunday is designed to worship God through the gifts of those who, through their commitment to excellence in their craft, make us feel better, show us another spark of beauty, and attempt in their own way to bring to earth the “aesthetics of the infinite.” Arts Sunday provides the church with yet another lens through which to see God, hear God, and touch God. More than poems read on a particular Sunday—though poetry readings are definitely an integral part of the typical arts day celebration—it is an opportunity to help persons slow down long enough to incline their eyes, their ears, their hands, and their hearts towards the beauty created by our artists/crafts-persons.

With this material as our backdrop, we provide a sermon outline for Arts Day.

II. Arts Day: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): 1 Samuel 16:14-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 14) Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. (v. 15) And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. (v. 16) Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." (v. 17) So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." (v. 18) One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him." (v. 19) So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." (v. 20) Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. (v. 21) And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. (v. 22) Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." (v. 23) And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

B. Possible Titles

- i. The Power of Soul Music
- ii. Then Sings My Soul
- iii. Redemption Songs

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the nature of the disorder with which Saul wrestles. Initially, the notion that the evil spirit came from God may cause us to pause, but it is most likely rooted in Old Testament witness that recognizes God as the source of all things, both good and evil. While some may be prone to label Saul's malady as solely of the flesh or of the spirit, such labeling is the least important part of the equation. His malady comes from God and that is the issue that is most noteworthy.

While this text may lend itself to an appreciation for the power of music to the soul, we must also be careful to attribute the source of this power to God. As with any subject, careful exegesis keeps us from allowing music to claim our praise more than the Holy Spirit that is at work behind the lyrics and melodies.

The use of music as the remedy for healing and the prescription of David as the musician also require careful exegetical attention. As Walter Brueggemann states, "The narrative invites us to wonder how it is that a member of Saul's company should have ready a nominee from an

obscure Judean village.”¹ The statement can be best understood in light of God’s plan to appoint David as King. The New Interpreter’s Commentary points out that the repetition of the word “spirit” only emphasizes the transition of God’s Spirit and anointing from Saul to David. As the second of three stories that highlight David’s movement to the throne, this story underscores a shift in the position of David from the fields to the palace. This movement claims our attention as David’s musical abilities open the door for God’s greater purposes. In this way, God’s power through music is used to highlight both the decline of Saul and rise of David as God’s anointed.

III. Introduction

“Whoever reads the history of man, weighs his sorrows and measures his joy, will read the history of songs and anthems of his days.”² These are the words of Bishop Lucius H. Holsey, declared in his sermon “The Song of Believers” in 1896, and they still resonate with us today. It is true that music has long been a part of the dynamic history of human existence. Throughout the ages and in every nation, one finds songs that speak to the communal and individual experience of the soul in relationship to God. Throughout our history, music has been an integral part of the individual and collective worship of African Americans.

On the shores of West Africa, the rhythm of the drums carried our minds and bodies in what Albert Raboteau refers to as “danced religions.”³ In the journey through the sea of the Middle Passage, our bones and voices rang out in melodies of sorrow and pain. Carrying slavery like a heavy load, we looked ahead with “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and when we got ready to flee, we instructed one another with songs of the soul such as “Wade in the Water” and “Steal Away.” With weary throats awaiting emancipation, we sang “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” And when freedom appeared to come our way, we rejoiced with “Amazing Grace.” As we entered the modern fight for civil rights, we stood strong with “We Shall Overcome.” And after gaining slight change, hanging on to slight hope, our souls still sang “Oh Happy Day!” We are a people who, for centuries, have made it through on the wings of a song.

Yet, in our post-modern society, we are faced with many forces that attempt to dilute the power of music that ministers to and uplifts the soul. Materialism lures artists to trade their souls for platinum records. Sexism seduces musicians to exchange romance for vulgarity and shame. And at the top of the list, secularism leads gifted psalmists to replace biblical truth with the latest catchy praise and worship phrases. In these serious and troubled times, as evil pervades the landscape of our lives, we still need God to minister to us in song. We need to know that God still has a song that will carry us through. We need to know that God is still able because God’s power is still real. We need a song that will deliver us from evil. We need a song that will mend our broken hearts. We need a song that will lift us above our trials. We need a song to remind us of the goodness of the God we serve.

Through David’s ministry to Saul, God demonstrates the healing power of music and God stamps his seal of approval on the arts and artists. This story underscores God’s ability to minister to his people through music and to anoint musicians and artists with gifts that can stir and serve as a salve to the soul.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – Music is a prescription

On this Arts Day and every day we see that music can serve as a prescription for what ails us. In verses 15 and 16, Saul’s servant diagnoses Saul’s problem as an evil spirit from God and gives the prescription of music to make him feel better.

- a. God can use music as the prescription to heal our hearts. The Psalms provide many examples of music as a balm for David’s depression. Examples include Psalm 42 and 43;
- b. God can use music as the prescription to mend our minds. Singing and listening to music is scientifically proven to be therapy for our minds, taking us to places of greater emotionally stability; and
- c. God can use music as the prescription to ease our burdens. Music helps change our perspectives, helping us to see our burdens in a different light.

Move/Point Two – Music can proclaim the presence of God

In verse 16, the servant states that the evil spirits will flee when the musician plays.

- a. When music proclaims the presence of God, evil spirits to tremble. This presence allows us to gain strength over that which is not like God. So, this form of artistic expression is more than performance for performance sake;
- b. God can use music to proclaim his power. This is the power that can demolish strongholds, cast out demons, and cause the devil to flee; and
- c. God can use music to proclaim his peace. When we proclaim the peace of God, we cast out anxiety and anything that would keep us from that peace. So, artists can be peace makers.

Move/Point Three – Music can be prophetic

In verses 21-23, David finds favor in the eyes of Saul and begins to take his place in the Kingdom. This movement is part of God’s prophetic act to elevate David and demote Saul. So, when we see people serving in various positions as artists, never assume that their work is inconsequential. We never know when God will use it for Kingdom purposes.

- a. God can use music as prophetic witness of his plans for our lives (“Please be patient with me, God is not through with me yet”);
- b. God can use music as prophetic witness of his plans for our community. As the spirituals gave directions to slaves about where they should go, so does can God use music today to guide our communities into greater freedom and purpose (“We Shall Overcome”);
- c. God can use music as prophetic witness of his plans for the Church. Music reminds us that Jesus Christ is coming back for the Church and that we need to be ready when he comes (“He’s Coming Back Again”).

V. Celebration

With thanksgiving in our hearts, let us honor the anointed artists God has placed in our midst! When life seems to bear down hard on our shoulders, God has given artists who offer songs that minister to our souls. When it feels like our sorrows outweigh our joys, God sends forth musicians to soothe our weary spirits.

We come forth joyously with songs of praise to our Maker. Because of the grace of God, we sing in worship to our King! With the love of the Spirit, we open our hearts to the One who is, who was, and who is to come!

When Jesus comes, we will hear the songs of angels as they sing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” When Christ comes for us again, we will hear the elders sing “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!” When the Lord cracks the sky, I believe our ancestors will lift up their voices and sing, till earth and heaven ring. When our Savior comes, I believe we’ll hear David singing again:

Then sings my soul,
My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art!
How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul,
My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art!
How great Thou art!

VI. Illustration(s)

Bats and Echoes

Animals, such as bats, use a process called echo-location to find their way around in the dark. Bats send out a signal, a sound. The sound echoes off a solid object and returns to the bat’s ears. It is both the sound and the solid object that the sound bounces off of that helps the bat navigate its way around in the dark. There are obstacles in the way, but the bat navigates its way around the obstacles by sending out a sound that echoes back. And what we have found is that it’s the solid stuff, the hard stuff that actually helps the bat make its way through. In the times when life gets hard, I dare you to send out a praise sound, and watch it echo off of the hard stuff and help you navigate your way through!

—Cedrick Von Jackson, Sardis, Mississippi

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: Sounds of torment: groaning, shouting, crying; gentle music of a harp, lyre, guitar, singing; conversations (audible advice given to Saul, inaudible mumbling talking about Saul to others);

Sights: Saul talking/shouting to himself; internal wrestling; riches of the palace (gold, silver, weapons); David sitting and playing an instrument; Saul at peace with his eyes closed; and

Colors: Colors of torment and darkness (brown, black, grey, red); colors of peace and light (yellow, white, blue, green).

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymns

- It Is Well with My Soul. By Horatio G. Spafford. Tune, (VILLE DU HAVRE), by Philip P. Bliss
- Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine. By Fanny J. Crosby. Tune, (ASSURANCE), by Phoebe P. Knapp
- How Great Thou Art. Text and Tune, (O STORE GUD), by Stuart K. Hine
- I Love the Lord, He Heard My Cry. Tune, Meter Hymn. *This is a great Sunday to help keep long meter hymn singing alive. It is a valuable part of our history.*
- To God Be the Glory. By Fannie J. Crosby. Tune, (BE THE GLORY)), by William H. Doane

B. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2010)

- Mourning into Dancing. By Ron Kenoly
- Sing. By Israel Houghton and Aaron Lindsey
- Use Me. By Lynette Hammond

C. Invitational Song(s)

- Healing (Balm in Gilead). By Richard Smallwood

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

IX. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Arts Day

- True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary (African American Art and Biblical Interpretation). Noel, James A.; Ed. Brian K. Blount. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007. pp. 73-81
- Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present. “The Song of Believers.” Holsey, Lucius H.; Eds. Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. pp. 272-281
- Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, First and Second Samuel. Brueggemann, Walter. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue (Engaging Culture). Dyrness, William A. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Art for God's Sake: A Call to Recover the Arts. Ryken, Philip Graham. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006.
- Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy. Thompson, Robert Ferris. New York, NY: Vintage, 1984.

X. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- A. African American Art through praise and worship by Elle Stringfellow. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1iz8XLWu8> accessed 31 January 2011
- B. “Artful Film, African American Art – October Gallery.” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27yvIC7hKoE> accessed 31 January 2011
- C. “Black Jesus Art Collection” video consisting of black art by known and emerging ethnic artists features an African American Jesus Christ and the music from “Silver and Gold” by Kirk Franklin. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwxObVIzj5E> accessed 31 January 2011
- D. “Procession of the Levites & Anthem of Praise – ASBC Liturgical Dance and Bicentennial Choir.” “Procession of the Levites” and “Anthem of Praise” were performed by members of the Alfred Street Baptist Church Liturgical Dance Ministry and the Bicentennial Choir at the church’s 200th anniversary celebration. The program, “200 Years, Yet Not Forsaken, Psalm 37:25,” was held at the Cecil D. Hylton Memorial Chapel in Woodbridge, Virginia, on November 2, 2003. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEG8qpQrWAA&feature=related> accessed 31 January 2011
- E. Deaf Ministry Dance Performance: “Worshippers Without Words performing ‘Anthem of Praise’ by Richard Smallwood at TRM.” An inspirational youth praise dance video choreographed by Shontaye Mack, performed by Worshippers Without Words and produced at Truth Revealed Ministries, May 31, 2009. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjYTNTiJTh4&feature=related> accessed 31 January

2011. (For more information including future projects, please visit their Worshipers Without Words MySpace page at <http://www.myspace.com/479254206>.)

XI. Art Projects to Do with Children

A. Make Adire Cloth. In Africa, cloth is used for both decoration and communication. Celebrate African American heritage with your own colorful scarf or tablecloth that conveys a message. Online location: <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/adire-cloth-661042/> accessed 31 January 2011

B. Adinkra Printing. Adinkra is a type of cloth worn in Western Africa. It is a printed grid pattern made up of combed grid lines and a small shape printed in the squares. Online location: http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/adinkra_printing.htm accessed 31 January 2011

C. Bottle-cap Tambourines. Make and shake these tambourines that are popular in Brazil and Africa. Online location: <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/bottle-cap-tambourines-665451/> accessed 31 January 2011

D. Short biographies of African American visual artists. Time for Kids. Online location: <http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/specials/bhm/0,8805,194520,00.html> accessed 31 January 2011

XII. Links to Helpful Websites for Arts Day

- Website for information and history on spirituals and early Gospel Music: www.negrospirituals.com
- Repository of African American Art: www.africanartworld.com
- News stories on Haitians who used art to find hope: http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/03/25/1548099_p2/haitians-see-hope-through-art.html

XIII. Celebrate African American Artistic Institutions

- **James Baldwin is an artistic institution.** Baldwin said: “The day will come when you will trust you more than you do now, and you will trust me more than you do now. And we can trust each other. I do believe, I really do believe in the New Jerusalem. I really do believe that we can all become better than we are. I know we can. But the price is enormous—and people are not yet willing to pay it.” (James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket. Karen Thorsen, Dir., 1990.)

After the assassinations of his friends Medgar Evers, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, Baldwin returned to France where he worked on a book about the disillusionment of the times, If Beale Street Could Talk (1974). Many responded to the harsh tone of If Beale Street Could Talk with accusations of bitterness. But, even if

Baldwin had encapsulated much of the anger of the times in his book, he always remained a constant advocate for universal love and brotherhood. James Baldwin was one of the most important and vocal advocates for equality. From Go Tell It on the Mountain to The Evidence of Things Not Seen (1985), James Baldwin created works of literary beauty and depth that will remain essential parts of the American literary canon. Baldwin is an artistic institution.

- **Sam Cooke is an artistic institution.** Cooke put the spirit of the black church into popular music, creating a new American sound and setting into motion a chain of events that forever altered the course of popular music and race relations in America. See these two trailers from “Crossing Over” from the American Master’s series. Online location: <http://vimeo.com/8622470> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWNdoVK4vaY> accessed 8 January 2011
- **Sweet Honey in the Rock and the African American a cappella singing tradition are artistic institutions.** See the essay by Clarence Boyer that accompanies the American Master’s video “Sweet Honey in the Rock.” Online location: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/episodes/sweet-honey-in-the-rock/about-sweet-honey-in-the-rock/716/> accessed 8 January 2011
- **The Negro Ensemble Company is an artistic institution.** Since its founding in 1967, the NEC has produced more than 200 new plays and provided a theatrical home for more than 4,000 cast and crew members. Among its ranks have been some of the best black actors in television and film, including Louis Gossett Jr., Sherman Hemsley, and Phylicia Rashad. The NEC is respected worldwide for its commitment to excellence and has won dozens of honors and awards. While these accolades point to the larger success of the NEC, it has created something far greater. It has been a constant source and sustenance for black actors, directors, and writers as they have worked to break down walls of racial prejudice. Online location: <http://www.necinc.org/> accessed 8 January 2011.

XIV. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymn(s)

- It Is Well with My Soul. By Horatio G. Spafford. Tune, (VILLE DU HAVRE), by Philip P. Bliss

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #377

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. Nashville, TN: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2000. #448

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. #376

- Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine. By Fanny J. Crosby. Tune, (ASSURANCE), by Phoebe P. Knapp
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #508

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. #450

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #93
- How Great Thou Art. Text and Tune, (O STORE GUD), by Stuart K. Hine
Location
African American Heritage Hymnal. #148

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. #68

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #39
- I Love the Lord, He Heard My Cry. African American Traditional. Tune, Meter Hymn
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #394

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #53
- To God Be the Glory. By Fannie J. Crosby. Tune, (BE THE GLORY), by William H. Doane
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #157

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. #21

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #19

B. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2000–2010)

- Mourning into Dancing by Ron Kenoly
Location:
Lift Him Up Collection. New York, NY: Sony, 2005.
- Sing. By Israel Houghton and Aaron Lindsey
Location:
Munizzi, Martha. The Best Is Yet to Come. Orlando, FL: Martha Munizzi Music, 2003.
- Use Me. By Lynette Hammond
Location:
Commonwealth of PA Church of God in Christ Mass Choir. Live @ 81st Annual Holy Convocation. Philadelphia, PA: Dmaestro's Productions, 2001.

C. Invitational Song(s)

- Healing (Balm in Gilead). By Richard Smallwood
Location:
Richard Smallwood with Vision. Healing Live in Detroit. New York, NY: Verity, 1999.

Notes

1. Brueggemann, Walter. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, First and Second Samuel. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990. p. 126.
2. Holsey, Lucius H. "The Song of Believers." Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present. Eds. Martha Simmons and Frank Thomas. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010. p. 273.
3. Raboteau, Albert J. Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South. Oxford University Press, 1978. p. 13.