



FATHER'S DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, June 19, 2011

Bernice Johnson Reagon, Lectionary Team Cultural Resource Commentator

I. Etymology

The keyword that overarches this unit is faith/faithfulness. We now look at its etymology and the corresponding terms associated with it.

“Belief used to mean “trust in God,” while *faith* meant “loyalty to a person based on promise or duty” (a sense preserved in *keep one’s faith*, *in good (or bad) faith*, and in common usage of *faithful*, *faithless*, which contain no notion of divinity). But *faith*, as cognate of L. *fides*, took on the religious sense beginning in 14c. translations, and *belief* had by 16c. become limited to “mental acceptance of something as true,” from the

religious use in the sense of “things held to be true as a matter of religious doctrine” (early 13c.).

Faith— mid-13c., “duty of fulfilling one’s trust,” from O.Fr. *feid, foi* “faith, belief, trust, confidence, pledge,” from L. *fides* “trust, faith, confidence, reliance, credence, belief,” from root of *fidere* “to trust,” from PIE base *bheidh-* (cf. Gk. *pistis*; see *bid*). For sense evolution, see *belief*. Theological sense is from late 14c.; religions called *faiths* since c.1300.

Trust—c.1200, from O.N. *traust* “help, confidence,” from P.Gmc. *traust-* (cf. O.Fris. *trast*, Du. *troost* “comfort, consolation,” O.H.G. *trost* “trust, fidelity,” Ger. *Trost* “comfort, consolation,” Goth. *trausti* “agreement, alliance”). Related to O.E. *treowian* “to believe, trust,” and *treowe* “faithful, trusty.”¹

II. Memories Sparked by Today’s Scripture

In today’s Scripture (Genesis 22:1-19), God tests the strength of Abraham’s faith. Abraham is told to take Isaac, his only son, and go to a certain place and offer him to God in a burnt offering. As I tried to get inside of this concept of faith, up came the song that was the theme song of the Civil Rights Movement, used in mass meetings, in jails, and in marches and continues to have an international life as a hymn of faith in communities all over the world. We hear this hymn of freedom where people gather to witness in a collective voice for justice and freedom and change.

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome someday
Oh deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome some day

We’ll walk hand in hand...
We are not afraid...
The truth shall set us free...

Right behind that the gospel hymn written by Albert A. Goodson came to me:

We’ve Come This Far by Faith

We’ve come this far by faith
leaning on the Lord.
Trusting in His Holy word
He never failed me yet.
Oh’ Can’t Turn Around
We’ve come this far by faith

Verse:

Just the other day, I heard a man say
He did not believe in God's word
But I can truly say, the Lord has made a way
He's never failed me yet

Chorus:

We've come this far by faith....²

This gospel hymn was used in church services as a processional song with the choir moving in time, filling the sanctuary with a call to faith-based living and service. The verse of the song indicates that there are those who do not believe, do not have faith, and do not trust in God's presence, and that hesitating witness is answered with a repeat of the chorus expressing steadfast belief that God will be with the faithful.

This year's Scripture for Father's Day also took me back to my childhood and my father, Reverend Jesse Johnson, when he preached from this same scriptural passage. His sermon was basically teaching the Scripture as a narrative with several key points lifted for emphasis. He took as his theme "God Will Provide." First, God comes to Abraham and tells him to serve Him, that he is to sacrifice his son in a burnt offering.

I still remember sitting in the pews at Mt. Early Baptist Church and seeing in my mind's eye as father Abraham gathers his son and they began to journey to a mountain where the offering is to take place. Turning the scriptural assignment in my mind, another image quickly came to mind. That is the part that talks about Abraham taking his *only* son—and I could just hear the older women I grew up with sitting with their arms folded and wondering, "Only son? What happened to Hagar and her baby...?" (But that is another matter for another day.) My father then discussed the position of the son in the text, wondering as he helps to gather wood for the altar, Where is the offering? When the altar is built, as Abraham takes his son, binds him to the altar, and slowly draws back his hand which is wielding a knife, an angel providentially appears and stops him. Abraham looks up and sees a ram which he uses to carry out the burnt offering without sacrificing his son. At this point my father said: "You just step out on God's word, God will not fail; He will provide!"

III. Faithful Fathers

The song we sang in elementary school morning devotion that had both faith and fathers as key concepts was "Faith of Our Fathers," living still:

Faith of Our Fathers

Faith of our fathers, living still,
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whenever we hear that glorious Word!

Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.³

This year's Father's Day Lectionary reading concerns fathers and their practice of faith and faithfulness toward their families. As we discuss faith and faithfulness of fathers my guiding concept is: *Non-conventional notions*. It is important to understand that "fathering" as it relates to the needs of the African American community does not always fit into conventional notions of family (mother, father, two children, and a dog). My family consisted of father, mother, eight children, one or two dogs and cats. On television, the family was white and it did not reflect my family life. My father worked as a carpenter and pastor, four churches, one for each Sunday. My mother worked inside and outside the home. Carrying different loads, I grew up in a home where my parents were partners, with mother and children carrying the heaviest loads of work connected with maintaining the home. Our lives were woven with prayers and songs that expressed powerful notions of faith and trust in a power beyond human capacity.

In this the twenty-first century, we must draw upon the notions of parenting that evolved in our communities where there were not necessarily always two parents (often one had been sold or worse), a mother at home working, father working outside of the home, with the children being assigned formative tasks as soon as they were able to assist. Moving through the twentieth century, even as there was a major effort to hold up family formation as a worthy life goal, there was great slippage. We still have many communities where children are not safe in their daily lives at home, in school, on the street. Many families do not experience the additional support that comes from local church membership or community organizations created to do just that. The notion of communal fathering is urgently needed for our children and must increase as a way to assist home units where there are fathers present, and we must operate as a substitute when there are no fathers in the home. Communal fathering has always been and definitely remains an important resource for our communities and our families.

In this regard, faith is key, because communal fathering requires a deep, long-term, and consistent commitment. We need to have faith that we as church people can make family building and the needs of three generation units (children, parents, grandparents) a primary focus of our work for the twenty-first century. It should be noted that having training or previous experience are not a prerequisite of taking on massive efforts, but seeing the need and believing that God is with you is what is required.

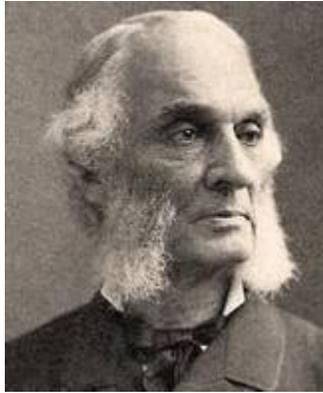
Three Early Philadelphia Community-Building Fathers

It is a reality that sperm/egg unions producing children did not govern or define *parenting* during our early days on this continent. So many men stepped forward because of an understanding that for a future, African Americans needed a community, and that community needed to create ways to go beyond the contemporary generation. For that to happen there was a need for children to be born and not sold into slavery and there was a need for adults to take up the responsibility of parenting children. There was also a need

for the creation of a collective communal home of families that belonged to and was maintained by the families and this was the church and black schools.



Bishop Richard Allen



Robert Purvis



Rev. Absalom Jones

The creation of strong African American communities required a lifetime commitment from men and women of great faith and a capacity for parenting and sacrifice, hard work, and the determination for our people to be self-sufficient and ever moving forward. During the period of the 18th and 19th centuries a strong African American community developed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Among the leading fathers of faith and activism were Richard Allen, Robert Purvis, and Absalom Jones. They were fathers of families, creators of new institutions including church denominations and a strong community of free and slave people.

(A) Richard Allen—From Slave to Bishop (1760–1831)

Richard Allen was born in 1760, a slave of Benjamin Chew, the attorney general of Pennsylvania, at his estate “Cliveden,” surrounded by a Black community. Allen became sympathetic to the Methodist faith, which was natural since John Wesley, one of Methodism’s founders, had vigorously attacked the slave trade. In February 1786, Allen came to Philadelphia, and by 1789 had been ordained as the first Black deacon of the Methodist church. He was among those in 1792 who led a walkout of protested separation at the Mother Church in Philadelphia and that led to the formation a new African American church Mother Bethel and in 1816 was a leading founder of the a new African Methodist Episcopal denomination. He was a true father of an African American Christian community.⁴

(B) Robert Purvis—Abolitionist (1810–1898)

Robert Purvis provided leadership to that same Black community in the somber years of struggle with slavery from 1830 until the Civil War. Purvis was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on November 4, 1810. His father was an Englishman who came to America about 1790 and became a cotton broker. His mother was the daughter of a German-Jewish flour merchant and an African woman who’d been born in Morocco in 1750,

spirited into captivity at age twelve, and sold in Charleston. Somehow his African mother achieved freedom and married the Jewish merchant. In 1819, the father of Robert Purvis sent the whole family to Philadelphia. The father died in 1826, leaving an estate of over \$120,000. Purvis was privately schooled, then went to Pittsfield Academy and briefly, to Amherst College.

At the age of twenty-three, he was a charter member of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He joined the American Moral Reform Society in 1835 and two years later was in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for the formation of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Purvis married Harriet Forten, the daughter of James Forten, herself a strong force in the antislavery movement.

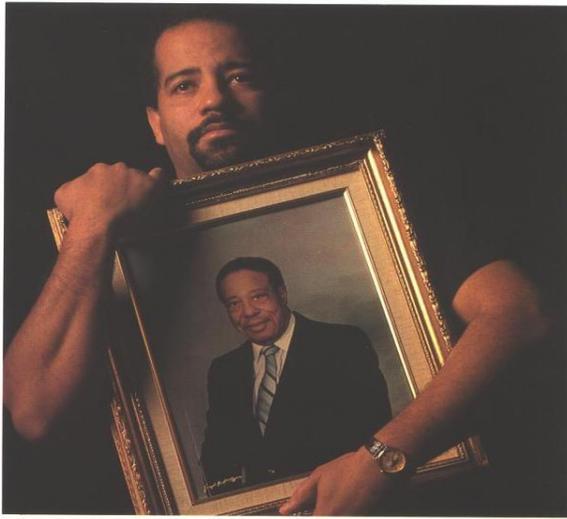
Purvis used all means, both legal and illegal, to combat the enemies of his people. He formed the Vigilant Committee in August 1837, composed mainly of Black men who were pledged to help slaves on their way to Canada. In 1840, he voted along with the majority to have the few remaining whites on that committee removed. When white rioters in 1842 made Purvis's home a target of their assault, he moved to a country estate outside of Philadelphia where his horse and carriages, and his personal assistant, were ever at the service of underground railroad members. His home was a place where, the abolitionist said "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest..." Purvis was called "The Father of the Underground Railroad," and according to William Still, his successor, he could always be counted in, no matter how dangerous the task.⁵

(C) Absalom Jones, a "Singular" Man (1746–1818)

Absalom Jones, also a "founding father" of Black Philadelphia, was born a slave in Delaware in 1746. When he was a child, whites made him wait on their table; earning some money he "bought" himself a primer (reading book from which children learned to read). He declared that reading made him "singular." When he was eighteen years old, his master sold off his mother, five brothers, and a sister, and Absalom was brought to Philadelphia. In 1785 he was able to purchase his own freedom.

Absalom Jones was forty-six when he became the pastor of St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. He was the strong right arm of Richard Allen, and was present at Allen's ordination to the bishopric of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His influence remained local, unlike that of his mentor. He is said to have been a mild, heavy-set, dark-skinned man who often visited the sick. He hated the bondage of his people and warned the whites that if they loved their children they should not burden their heads with slavery.⁶ James Forten, Richard Allen, and Absalom Jones were the fathers of the Philadelphia Black community from its inception through 1830.

You might ask, what do the lives and accomplishments of men like Richard Allen, Robert Purvis, and Absalom Jones have to do with contemporary 21st century fathers? Well, I recommend these 18th and 19th century examples because we in the 21st century are called to restore in some cases and recreate in others the African American community as the



Nelson Standifer holds a portrait of his late father, G. Van Standifer, founder of the Midnight Basketball League. Photographs by C. W. Griffin

foundational nurturing ground for African American families, and parenting is required for the community and for the children borne into our communities.

Today, it is before us to bring into our communal spaces the children in our communities and father and ground them with parenting and teaching that insist that they can excel no matter what the obstacles. It is crucial to form a vision and then step out and risk all understanding that through faith and a refusal to turn around much can be

achieved. This work cannot be effectively done without the presence of fathers being a consistent force in taking on this sacred work.



IV. Some Faithful Twentieth Century Fathers

(A) G. Van Standifer and The Midnight Basketball League

“While serving as City Manager of Glen Arden, Maryland, Mr. G. Van Standifer studied police reports that decisively showed that most crime occurred during the hours of 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and was committed by individuals from a narrow age group (17–25 years old). In response to the escalating crime rate in his town, in June 1986, he established the Midnight Basketball League, Inc. (MBL). Using basketball as the invitation, young men who participated in games had to also participate in other MBL

program components to be eligible to play in league games. Mr. Standifer provided workshops and educational opportunities. From the beginning, the MBL Program was a success, embraced and supported by local businesses, law enforcement, and political/community leaders.

MBL's success in Glen Arden generated national attention. Programs sprang up throughout the United States, from the founding city of Glen Arden to cities such as Chicago, Camden, Cleveland, Atlanta, and San Francisco. After the founder's death in September 1992, the program continued under the leadership of his sons Eric and Nelson Standifer. Throughout the '90s and the turn of the century the program spread to 50 cities nationwide. There was a decline when many cities with changes in local leadership dropped funding of their local program.

Today, Lawrence Gray, Jr. and Emanuel Hunt, Jr. remain believers in the power of the MBL Program to inspire and uplift. They are continuing MBL Inc. as a non-profit organization, providing consistency of operation amongst chapters, nurturing chapter growth, and perpetuating the history of the MBL Program.”⁷

(B) The 100 Fathers, Inc.—Ordinary Men Doing Extraordinary Things⁸

Franklyn M. Malone Founder & C.E.O. “Ordinary Men Doing Extraordinary Things”

Mr. Franklyn M. Malone was working in Alexandria, Virginia, with the Northern Virginia Fatherhood Coalition when he recognized that so many of the young men in the surrounding community had no fathers. Many were caught up in a 35–40-year system of welfare reform that did not allow men to be in the house if the family received a welfare check or food stamps—often leaving the house devoid of any adult male role model. Too often the models in the community were drug dealers. “I started the organization to save the children,” said Mr. Malone. He along with Tony Douglas (who created the name 100 Fathers, Inc.) started the outreach program in Washington, DC. “One father equals 100 school masters,” Mr. Malone continued—stating that studies show that children's grades increase when fathers gets involved in their education and that the same children excel when fathers help with homework. Mr. Malone is also on the board of Y.O.R.M. (Year of Responsible Men, <http://2011yorm.com/>), an organization geared to increasing the involvement and making more visible male positive role models for children.

Extraordinary Things



The Mission statement of 100 Fathers, Inc.—Ordinary Men Doing Extraordinary Things says in part, “We will address five critical areas:

1. Promoting Health and Wellness;
2. Eliminating violence and inappropriate behavior in our youth;
3. Promoting values and character development;
4. Influencing fathers to increase involvement with their children education; and

5. Leading fathers toward greater involvement with their children and families.”

100 Fathers, Inc.—Ordinary Men Doing Extraordinary Things, are answering the call of so many children, as indicated in the words of the song “Father Me” by Bishop Joseph McCargo:

Father, wrap me in Your arms,
Father, wrap me in Your arms.
Father, wrap me in Your arms
and father me⁹

V. Community Fathers—Two Boy Scout Troops

(A) Boy Scout Troop 107, Steelton, Pennsylvania

Many of our churches have traditionally formed organizations for the youth of their communities. Mr. Eugene Allen wrote the following in 2005 about a Boy Scout Troop and its Scout Master who fathered him and so many others.

Boy Scout Troop 107 was organized in 1941 by Mr. John E. Hughes. Mr. Hughes was the scoutmaster and the troop was sponsored by the First Baptist Church of Steelton, Rev. E. L. Green, pastor. John Hughes was a man with vision. During World War II, he directed his troop to collect scrap metal and old newspapers which were sold to purchase a truck, which allowed for even larger amounts of scrap to be collected. This material was then sold to purchase a school bus, making Troop 107 the only scout troop in south central Pennsylvania with its own transportation. People were always wide eyed and amazed when we arrived in our big yellow bus to compete in softball games and other scouting activities. Troop 107 was largely responsible for clearing the property near Halifax, PA which became the YMCA’s Camp Inglenook. The troop spent two weeks sleeping in tents and fighting off snakes to clear the area for the construction of cabins. We were a singing group. In addition to the usual scouting activities, Mr. Hughes used to have us sing at different church functions in the area (Black and White). Having a bus made us arrive in style!

Mr. Hughes was awarded the ‘Silver Beaver Metal’ for his scouting achievement. He proudly wore this emblem as if it was the Congressional Metal of Honor. In addition to the Boy Scout motto of “Be Prepared,” Mr. Hughes had a motto for 107, “Second to None!” Although I never rose to a scouting level beyond Tender Foot, I am still proud to have been a member of John Hughes’ Troop 107.

...Teet Camak was Mr. Hughes’ assistant. In May 1946 (around Memorial Day) the Susquehanna River went on one of its annual rampages. Mr. Hughes and some of us scouts rounded up folding army cots and set them up in the basement of the First Baptist Church as a make-shift shelter for people fleeing the flood from the West Side of the city. We then used the bus to transport families either to the

church or to relatives' or friends' homes on the "hill." I recall that the entire Fleming family moved into our house on Bessemer Street...all those people crammed into that tiny house sleeping in three bedrooms, an attic, a living room, on the porch, in the kitchen...anywhere you could stretch out. We survived the ordeal.

Mr. Hughes was a man ahead of his time. If it hasn't already been done, a monument to his service to the community needs to be erected in a prominent place. He needs to be recognized for his faith in us kids and the way he nurtured us when not many others took the time to do so. He spent so much of his time, talents and treasures to insure that we "rough stones" could someday be polished into diamonds. Such a gesture would be a small way to say thanks and to let the world know that a giant of a man lived amongst us and was a role model for so many young men."¹⁰

Boy Scout Troop 107 of Steelton, PA



(B) To Be Raised with Many Fathers—Cub Scout Pack 515

My fathers came from my neighborhood...¹¹

I grew up in a very close knit neighborhood in what was then, Seat Pleasant, MD and now is Capitol Heights, MD. As if by divine design our neighbors became family in no time. Any child could literally call out “mom” or “dad” in a room and be answered by as many parents as were there. This happened so often that we had to change to calling the ones who were not our parents, aunts and uncles or at least qualify them by saying Ma Williams or Daddy Frisby. It remained that way for decades and still to some degree to this very day.

My Uncle Napoleon B. Lewis and his wife Helena D. Lewis were leaders of our Cub Scout pack, pack 515, based out of Metropolitan Baptist Church, then located at 13th and R Streets in North West Washington, D.C. I can only imagine that they saw a need in a community with so many kids and filled it. It was like that throughout the neighborhood. Mr. Gladden, Warren’s father, taught all of us how to play chess. He would have tables set up in his house on the Saturdays we weren’t in cub scouts or boy scouts. It seemed as though *every* dad would either create something for us to do or join in with the other fathers. My dad along with Charles and Scott’s dad, Mr. Harris, Derrick and Michael’s father, Mr. Wooten, were the little league coaches for baseball, basketball, and football. Mr. Tolson and Mr. Thurman involved us in football with the “Punt, Pass, and Kick” Program. Dennis’ father Mr. Colmes drove the church school bus to take us to Sunday school, and Mr. Enoch Smith was our Sunday school teacher. Our neighborhood was filled with strong father figures and inevitably their wives had just as many activities for the girl children. This was an era when anybody’s parents could discipline you and did. I was always afraid of a scolding from one of the other dads because that meant you were going to get scolded twice. I could continue to go through my neighborhood and name names of the fathers that contributed to my well-being. I am so grateful and salute them all.¹²



Cub Scout Troop 515, Metropolitan Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.

VI. Conclusion—Anthems for Black Fathers

I Feel Like Going On

I feel like going on
I feel like going on
Though trials come on every hand
I feel like going on

I feel like going on
I feel like going on
Though the storm may be raging
And the billows are tossing high,
I feel like going on¹³

Thomas Andrew Dorsey, the father of gospel music, coined the name of the new songs he was composing for worship “gospel songs.” In his song “The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow,” Dorsey uses the metaphor of a battered ship in a storm to describe the struggle of building a Christian life of meaning for oneself and one’s family in a society that seems cold and unsupportive. Again and again in the text of this song, Dorsey urges us to go on through every storm, every fall, every loss and sorrow, with faith that we are not alone—there is a prayer-hearing God and our cries will be answered. This is an anthem for all black fathers who faithfully each day step up to face the challenges of fatherhood.

The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow

Like a ship that's tossed and driven, battered by an angry sea;
when the storms of life are raging, and their fury falls on me.
I wonder what I have done, that makes this race so hard to run;
then I say to my soul, take courage, the Lord will make a way somehow.

Chorus:

The Lord will make a way somehow, when beneath the cross I bow,
He will take away each sorrow, let Him have your burdens now.
When the load bears down so heavy, the weight is shown upon my brow,
there's a sweet relief in knowing .the Lord will make a way somehow.

Try to do the best in service, try to do the best you can;
When I choose to do the right thing, evil's present on every hand.
I look up and wonder why, that good fortune passed me by;
then I say to my soul, be patient, the Lord will make a way somehow.

Often there's misunderstanding, out of all the good I do;
go to friends for consolation, and I find them complaining, too.
So many nights I toss in pain, wondering what the day will bring;
then I say to my heart, don't worry, the Lord will make a way somehow.¹⁴

Notes

1. www.etymonline.com
2. "We've Come This Far by Faith" Online location: http://www.music-lyrics-gospel.com/gospel_music_lyrics/weve_come_this_far_by_faith_5927.asp accessed 25 February 2011
3. "Faith of Our Fathers." Text by Frederick W. Faber; composer Henri F. Henry.
4. Ballard, Allen B. "Black Philadelphia Leaders." One More Day's Journey. New York, NY: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1951, pp. 33–36.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. This information was obtained from the website of The Midnight Basketball League, Inc. Online location: <http://www.amblp.com/history.htm> accessed 19 February 2011
8. 100 Fathers Inc. Online location: http://100fathersinc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=2

9. "Father Me." By Bishop Joseph McCargo. Online location: http://www.allthelyrics.com/lyrics/shekinah_glory_ministry/father_me-lyrics-1252322.html accessed 19 February 2011
10. E-mail correspondence, Eugene Allen to Afrolumens Project (www.afrolumens.org), subject: "Steelton Boy Scout Troop 107," July 14, 2005. The photograph came from the collection of Mr. Moore of Steelton, Pennsylvania. It depicts a group portrait of Boy Scout Troop 107 of Steelton from several decades ago.
11. Cub Scout Pack 515, Metropolitan Baptist Church, Washington, D.C. Notes provided by Darrin Frisby of Washington, D.C.
12. Ibid.
13. "I Feel Like Going On." Online location: www.gospelvideotv.com/.../Bishop-Marvin-Winans--I-Feel-Like-Going-On accessed 19 February 2011
14. "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow." Online location: http://www.lyrics.The_Hymn_Lord_will_Make_a_Way_Somehow accessed 19 February 2011