



MAAFA

Sunday February 6, 2010

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The unit you are viewing, MAAFA, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermonic outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see MAAFA in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 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: MAAFA

Dr. Brad Braxton writes in the 2008 Lectionary unit for MAAFA:

MAAFA is a Kiswahili term meaning the “Great Disaster” (of 15th–19th century European, North American, South American, and Caribbean slavery). Some African American congregations conduct MAAFA services to honor the heroic struggle of black Africans who were violently seized from their ancestral lands and pressed into inhumane chattel slavery.

These services also memorialize the millions of black Africans who died in the “Middle Passage”—the brutal, trans-Atlantic voyage—in the hulls of slave ships.

While MAAFA services acknowledge this grim period in world history, they primarily accentuate the determination and resistance of those victimized by slavery. Furthermore, these services invite participants to relinquish to God the bitterness, hatred, and guilt concerning these atrocities, in order to be more spiritually ready for protest against the present manifestations of “slavery” around the globe. Finally, by remembering the “Great Disaster,” congregations challenge the tendency of countries and cultural groups to ignore or de-emphasize the tragedy and lingering effects of chattel slavery. MAAFA services are now held throughout the United States.¹

With this background information we present the sermonic outline.

II. MAAFA: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text: Deuteronomy 7:7-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 7) It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. (v. 8) It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (v. 9) Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

B. Possible Titles

- i. People, Peril, Pride, and a Promise!
- ii. Love Has Everything to Do with It!
- iii. The Providential Power of God’s Promise

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

The use of the narrative of the Egyptian enslavement of the Hebrews as a parallel, a paradigm, or a model for the enslavement of the sons and daughters of Africa brings with it some **definite and decided challenges**.

Joseph, Jacob’s second-to-youngest son and one for whom one of the twelve tribes (sons of Jacob) is named, was sold into slavery by his brothers. He ended up in Egypt, where after a period of time and unfolding of events, he became viceroy (second to the king). His brothers came to Egypt to buy food during a famine, and they were reunited. Joseph invited his father, Jacob, and brothers (all Hebrews) to join him in Egypt, which they did. They went down to Egypt with 70 people and there they grew into a large nation. The children of Jacob flourished in

Egypt as long as Joseph was alive and until a new Pharaoh began to fear their power and decided to enslave them. According to the biblical narrative, the Hebrews, or Israelites, were enslaved for 210 years in Egypt.

The Africans (our ancestors) who had been conscripted to slavery, on the other hand, had not freely submitted themselves to their slaveholders. They were kidnapped, stolen, and sold by warring tribal factions into bondage. Additionally, the African understanding of enslavement was far different from that of the European slaveholders who purchased these humans as barter and labor for their system of Triangular Trade in the Caribbean and the Americas. These slaveholders eventually went to Africa and without bartering stole and enslaved Africans.

Consequently, the expectations of Europeans and African slave traders were very different. Africans looked for the eventual emancipation of those who had been captured as a result of war or other confluence of sociological circumstance to their peoples and homelands. The European understanding of this “Peculiar Institution,” on the other hand, was one that would exist into perpetuity with no eventuality of emancipation in sight.

Additionally, the Hebrew people were treated with great hospitality and congeniality upon their arrival in Egypt, due in no small part to their having a representative in Egyptian High Government (Joseph), who was their voice in the political system of Egypt interceding on their behalf. African slaves enjoyed no such presence or voice in government pleading on their behalf. It was not until many years after the death of Joseph that “there arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph,” and the imminent fear of a hostile rebellion and takeover by this alien citizenry posed a threat in the minds of the Egyptian leadership. It was then that the Hebrew people were forced into slavery as laborers. The African, (with the exception of a few who came to the Americas as indentured servants before slave commerce became legal), however, were acquired with the premeditated intention and purpose of using them for slave labor and chattel in the commerce of sugarcane and rum in the West Indies and cotton and tobacco in the Americas.

III. Introduction

I would like to share with you, on this Sunday morning, the saga of a significant and meaningful love story, a story that finds a remarkable parallel in biblical history as is revealed in today’s pericope found in Deuteronomy chapter 7, verses 7-9. It is the story of a people snatched from their homeland and taken as chattel slaves to a land they knew not, dehumanized and corralled as livestock, treated as a marketable commodity for the benefit of the economic interest and success of the Triangular Trade Enterprise, and ferried through the Middle Passage.

Scattered in a demonic diaspora that sought not only to extricate them from the rich soil of their birth, but to rob them of their traditions, language, and culture, these people survived. From the Caribbean throughout the Americas, they made it! Not only did they survive, but they thrived and have managed, against all odds, to be a blessing to the world community.

We gather today to remember those sable, sun-kissed people and to celebrate their survival and the success of their contribution to the common stock of the world’s greatest resource: human ingenuity. Yes, human ingenuity coupled with the grace and the love of a God that would not let

the wonderful pregnant possibilities of greatness die like a dream stillborn in the womb of conscription and circumstance.

This, my dear sisters and brothers, is the reason for our collective concord and celebration on this Lord's Day. We gather to acknowledge and remember that there is a God who is concerned about the well-being of the totality of creation and is committed to the full reality of our total development as a race of people. A God who has, by God's own mighty hand, freed us from the shackles of being less than what we were created to be and continues to renew the divine covenant and promise made with our fore parents.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – God Values and Loves God's Creation

All historical movements in which people have sought to enslave others are always doomed to fail because God is always on the side of the oppressed since they matter to God.

- a. People are valued not because of their overwhelming population;
- b. People are not discounted because they are few in number; and
- c. People are important because God loves them.

Move/Point Two – Slavery Imperils the Dignity of Human Personhood

The enslavement of persons is an affront to God historically and today.

- a. Failure to acknowledge the humanity in others is inhumane;
- b. The subjugation of a cultural heritage that is different from your own is unconscionable; and
- c. To regard and respect the creaturehood of all humankind is to honor God.

Move/Point Three – Africa has given generously to the broad scope of the coffers of human existence

- a. We can be proud of the past contributions of Africa's sons and daughters to the world;
- b. We can be proud of the current contributions of those of African descent; and
- c. We are the proud heirs of a Divine Promise and a glorious future.

V. Celebration

God has promised us the surety of God's own faithfulness that was aforesaid covenanted with our ancestors and by familial conveyance has become our promise also! The mighty hand of God is a delivering hand. The mighty hand of God is a forgiving hand. The mighty hand of God is a restoring hand. The mighty hand of God is they conduit of blessings untold to them that love God and are in covenant with God.

From out of the mud huts of Egypt's first ghettos, God delivered the Hebrew slaves. From the "peculiar" and despicable Institution of Slavery's sugar cane and cotton fields, God delivered the beautiful black brothers and sisters of African descent. God has neither neglected nor forgotten us. God's love is ever certain today as God's love was with the emancipated of Egypt.

God continues to guide us with God's hand. Though the day be dark, and the opportunities scarce, God is STILL ever rich in mercy and in Grace and in love. God will not fail us, because God cannot fail us. It would go against the very nature of God to fail.

Although we may not agree with how God delivers and provides and protects, we cannot deny the providential hand of God moving on our behalf and making a way for us. Even when you cannot see God's hand at work, you can trust God's heart is in action.

VI. Illustration

God Values All

A king and queen's son was missing. The king sent out their entire army to find their son. The son of a prince and princess was missing. The prince sent word to his father, the king, to send out an army to find the missing son, and an army went forth. A lord's son was missing and the lord summoned the prince to have him intercede with his father so that at least a delegation could go forth to find the lord's son, and a delegation went forth. A poor, commoner's son was lost and he did not have the ability to get an audience with the king, the prince, or even the lord in his province. So, he knelt down to pray and cried as he talked to God. God heard him weeping and dispatched angels from around the universe, and they went forth to find the man's son. Be not dismayed if due to your social status God is the only one on whom you can call.

— The African American Lectionary Team

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

The sounds, sights, and colors in this passage include:

Sounds: Moses telling the people why God chose them;

Sights: The people assembled, the ground upon which they sat, the clothing and shoes of the men, women, and children, The Mighty hand of God, Moses standing and addressing the people, the people frowning as they remember the slavery under Pharaoh; and

Colors: The colors of the clothing the people wore, the clothing of Moses.

VIII. Songs to Use to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymn(s)

- God Leads His Children. By James Cleveland. Sung by James Cleveland and Cassietta Baker George. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAslOcaUcG4&feature=related>
- Guide Me O, Thou Great Jehovah. By William Williams. Arr. by Betty Gadling. Tune, (CWM RHONDDA).

B. Well-known Song(s)

- Why Did They Take Us Away? By Bernice Johnson Reagon

Why Did They Take Us Away?

Why did they take us away?
Why did they take us away?
Why did they take us away?

I can't reach out my arms
I can't reach out my arms
I stand on shifting sands

I hold on to my song
I hold on to my song
It makes me know my name

My sun is burning high
My sun is burning high
Come watch my golden flame

I can't roll back the years
I can't roll back the years
I must keep moving on...

- Freedom in the Air. Spiritual
- There is a Balm in Gilead. Spiritual. From Mahalia Jackson's concert in 1967 in Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFMY4V7RdbU> accessed 5 December 2010
- There Is a Balm in Gilead. Spiritual. Sung by Atlanta's New Creation Chorale. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dayYCac7VU> accessed 5 December 2010

C. Modern Song(s) (Written Between 2005-2010)

- Where Joy and Sorrow Meet. By David James White

D. Invitational Song(s)

- Lead Me, Guide Me. By Doris M. Akers

IX. Helpful Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- “MAAFA Timeline.” The Afrocentric Experience. Online location: http://theafrocentricexperience.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=49&Itemid=71 accessed 5 December 2010
- The MAAFA Welcomes the Deaf Community. “The MAAFA Suite: a Healing Journey.” St. Paul Community Baptist Church, Brooklyn, NY. Online location: http://wn.com/The_Commemoration_of_The_MAAFA or <http://www.spcbc.com/templates/System/details.asp?id=46549&PID=809326> accessed 5 December 2010

X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies on MAAFA

Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora. Ani, Marimba. Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1994. This book popularized the use of the term MAAFA in 1994.

The Black Holocaust for Beginners. Anderson, S.E. New York, NY: Writing and Readers Publishers, Inc., 2007 (1995).

The MAAFA and Beyond. Roberson, Erriel D. Columbia, MD: Kujichagulia Press, 1995.

Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture. Woolfolk, Lisa. Chicago and Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route. Hartman, Saidiya. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Grioux Publishers, 2007.

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymn(s)

- Guide Me O, Thou Great Jehovah. By William Williams. Arr. Betty Gadling. Tune, (CWM RHONDDA). African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #138.

B. Well-known Song(s)

- Why Did They Take Us Away? By Bernice Johnson Reagon. Online location: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=34589> accessed 5 December 2010
- Freedom in the Air. Online location: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?itemid=34589> accessed 5 December 2010

C. Modern Song(s) (Written Between 2005-2010)

- Where Joy and Sorrow Meet. By David James White. Sung by Stand. Avalon. Brentwood, TN: Sparrow Records, 2006. This arrangement is for a small ensemble, trio, or even a soloist, and can be used during the Period of Prayer or the Sermonic Selection.

D. Invitational Song(s)

- Lead Me, Guide Me. By Doris M. Akers. African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #474

Note

For further information on MAAFA ceremonies and history enter the word MAAFA in this website's search box, The Afrocentric Experience online location: <http://theafrocentricexperience.com/> accessed 6 December 2010