



SINGLES' SUNDAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, October 31, 2010

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Lection - Acts 16:11-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 11) We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, (v. 12) and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. (v. 13) On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. (v. 14) A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. (v. 15) When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

I. Introduction

One warm summer day years ago, in Queens, New York, I sat in the living room of the home in which I grew up. I sat watching television with my mother, enjoying love and laughter. As the show went to a commercial, my eyes gazed upward towards the exhibit of photos that were displayed above the television. I continued to scan the photos and noticed they were photos of my siblings, their spouses, and their children. I could not help but notice that my photo was not displayed.

I promptly asked my mother why there was not a picture of me displayed, and she responded, “That area is for my married children and their families. You are not married.” Though we chuckled at her response, I sat there in a state of shock. I could not believe she said what she said. After all, as the youngest child of 6, at that time, I was the only one with a master’s degree. I had travelled and performed in places that most people only dreamed about. I had never done drugs. I had never been pregnant; I was saved and living for God; and I had always done my best. Yet, in that moment, in that instance, I realized that all that didn’t get my photo on the mantle. To achieve that, I had to secure a husband and have some babies.

A few weeks later, while working in the basement of my church one Saturday morning, one of the sisters stood across the room staring at me. She later came closer and took a good look in my face and said, “You really are a pretty girl. I wonder what’s wrong with you; why aren’t you married?” What’s “WRONG” with me?! I thought, why does something have to be wrong with me? So many things rushed into my mind at that moment like, what’s wrong with these brothers out here? Why can’t they see that I am a “GOOD THING”? I wanted to say so much, but I refrained and continued my Kingdom work.

These are just two out of a plethora of encounters I have had when dealing with my status as a single. I’m sure I’m not alone. So, how does one deal? How does one cope? Is it possible to be saved, single, and satisfied? For some it is a struggle, for others it is a safe place, and for so many of us it is simply our reality.

II. Historical/Cultural Context

Often, perception is everything. In the realm of singleness, the society in which we live often regards singleness as a sad and miserable state. Generally speaking, one who is single is often viewed as unstable and incomplete.

In a recent article, a quote by Dorian Solot, who is associated with the Boston-based *Alternatives to Marriage Project*, captures the negative perception that is held against singles: “In our society, we consistently send the message that, if you are not married, you have fallen short. Something is missing in your life.”¹ This unearned negative badge can only be done away with by marriage many in society suggest.

In many cases the great emergence and leap in the number of single persons came about during the late ‘60s and ‘70s as a result of the “man-in-the-house” rule, which was a regulation that was formerly applied in certain jurisdictions that denied poor families welfare payments in the event that a man resided in the household.²

This rule was written to harm unmarried people who lived together. While some would argue that this added to the demise of the black family, one can also argue that this also contributed to the rise in self-investment and growth in women. Of, course there are numerous other reasons for the vast increase in American singles.

Historically, many African American churches that are progressive enough to identify singles as being worthy of recognition, or that have a singles ministry, focus their attention almost exclusively on unmarried individuals between the ages of 18 and 50. It is often assumed that all singles really want to get married—that they all are looking for a husband or wife. Unfortunately, this one-size-fits-all approach does not adequately capture the diversity that exists within the singles community. Singles in the United States are not a homogeneous group. As with all other groups in this country, singles are diverse. They are diverse in age, gender, marital history, divorce status, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, desire to marry or not, and many other areas.

Church programs that ignore or miss this diversity also miss the opportunity to fully serve and meet the needs of a large and growing section of our population—singles. While Church efforts may be laudable, if these efforts do not include the diverse needs of singles, there is no way they can be effective.

III. Singles Viewed Within the Broader Cultural Context

Recent United States census data provide a more balanced and exacting picture of American singles. That data recognizes the diversity that exists within the singles community and provides all American churches with sufficient information to develop appropriate and effective activities and programs to address the diverse needs of the singles community.

A 2005 report commissioned by the United States Census Bureau provides a portrait of women in America and focuses on comparisons with men at the national level. It reports that there have been major increases in the number of singles in this country since 1970 and indicates that “The data contained in the report are based on the samples of households who responded to the 1970, 1980, 1990 and the 2000 Census.”³

According to an article interpreting and reporting on that census data:

1. Singles now comprise 42% of the population over the age of 18.
2. Out of the 92 million singles, 54% are women, 60% have never been married, (25%) divorced, and 15% are widowed.
3. There are 15 million Americans over the age 65 who are unmarried and single.
4. According to the Census Bureau, for every 86 unmarried men, there are 100 unmarried women in the United States.⁴

These figures not only indicate a dramatic increase in the number of singles in America, but they also prove the proposition that singles are in every age group beyond the age of 18. They also indicate that

people are single due to divorce, widowhood, and because they have not married. Many of those people never intend to get married. Churches should accept this data and act accordingly.

IV. Removing Preacher Bias

Embedded within the foregoing data are preachers, pastors, and associate pastors, current and future. This is complicated by the fact that many of those individuals will be women. Churches need to prepare themselves for these dramatic changes in the American landscape. Some of your future clergy will be single and will remain single!

Many African American churches will not accept or call a pastor who is single (no matter what the reason) or if the candidate is a woman. Considering the number of African American churches that exist and the number that are being started each month, this element of preacher bias—calling only male married preachers—will have to change. Soon, there will not be enough married, male African American preachers to staff every available African American church. As with other biases, some prejudices fall out of necessity.

V. Remembering Jesus

The African American Church, like all Christian faith communities, represents the bride of Christ. His bride should be spotless. His church should be a light unto the world. To represent Christ is to live as Christ lived—as a person who loved others and gave himself in life and death for them. Every aspect and every ritual of the Church is to serve one purpose—that of leading souls to Christ and the fullness of life that Christ brings.

Remembering the former things requires us to focus on who Christ was and is. He was a light unto the world. He was also free of biases and prejudices. His love attended to the cares and needs of all men, women, and children. He was not first concerned with whether one was part of a particular religious group, gender group, or social group. *We must also remember that Christ was single!*

VI. Lessons from Lydia and Paul (Today's Text)

Two biblical examples of single persons who, as the kids say, “handled their business” are Lydia and Paul. In the case of Lydia, who is the main biblical character of focus in today’s lectionary commentary, we find a successful business woman, working at her craft, focused on her job and doing quite well at it. Though she is focused, she is still open enough to new things, new people, and a new way of doing life as she knows it. Because of her openness she has an encounter that changed her life and perspective. Her encounter with Paul and those traveling with him also put Lydia in a place where she was needed. She and her resources were called upon and she was ready and available.

As singles, it is important that we take from this passage that though we are excelling in our various educational and professional pursuits we cannot be so occupied with the things of this world that we are not open and available to the message and call of Jesus Christ in our lives. We are single in this season for a reason known only by God. Take advantage of this time that God desires to use you, your gifts, and your resources for God. Be open and available—you never know what God is up to and how it will impact generations of believers to come. Just ask Lydia and Paul!

VII. Songs That Speak to the Moment

In each of the songs selected, you will find the recurring theme of availing one's self to the work and purposes of God and Kingdom building. The songs speak to opening one's total being for these purposes. This is "acceptable and reasonable" service from those who are single, and all Christians for that matter.

Lord I'm Available to You

Verse:

You gave me my hands to reach out to men
To show him your love and your perfect plan
You gave me my ears I can hear your voice so clear
I can hear the cries of sinners, but can I wipe away their tears?

Verse:

You gave me my voice to sing your Word
To sing all your praises to those who've never heard
But with my eyes I see Your need for more availability
I see hearts that have been broken, so many people to be free.

Chorus:

Lord, I'm available to You. My will I give to You.
I'll do what You say do. Use me, Lord,
To show someone the way, and enable me to say
My storage is empty, and I am available to You.

Verse:

Now I'm giving back to You all the tools You gave to me.
My hands, my ears, my voice, my eyes; so You can use them as You please.
I have emptied out my cup, So that You can fill me up.
Now I'm free and I just want to be more available to You.

Bridge:

Use me, Lord, to show someone the way and enable me to say,
My storage is empty and I am available to You.

Vamp:

Soprano- Ahhhh
Alto/Ten - Ahhhhhh
(AS DIRECTED)

Repeat Bridge.⁵

If You Can Use Anything Lord, You Can Use Me

If You can use anything Lord, You can use me (2x).
Take my hands Lord and my feet,
touch my heart Lord and speak through me.
If You can use anything Lord, You can use me.

Verse 1

I remember a story in the Bible days,
You used a man called Moses with a rod in his hand.
You told Moses, Take the rod in your hand,
stretch it forth and walk on dry land;
if You can use anything Lord, You can use me.

Verse 2

I remember a story,
I remember it well,
You used a shepherd boy, David,
with a sling in his hand.
He took the rock with the sling in his hand,
he slung the rock and the giant fell dead;
if You can use anything Lord, please use me.

Verse 3

You can use anything that You want to use,
big or small, short or tall,
You just call and we'll come running.
You took two fishes and five loaves of bread,
five thousand people you fed;
If You can use anything Lord, You can use me.⁶

Use Me

Use me, I'm available for you to use me
I'll live for You, I'll serve You, Lord
I'll work for You, Oh, will You help me say, yeah

Use me, I'm available for You to use me (Y-e-a-h)
I'm available, I want to live for You, Yes
Serve You, Lord, Yes
My Lord, please won't You use me, yeah
I'll live for You, yes
I'll serve You, yes
I'll work for You

I know that You are
You are my God, You are, You are
And You're on the move
I am, I am there for You

So please won't You use me

All I want to do is
Just say the word and You know I'll go
Just say the word and Lord You know, I'll go, go
Just say the word and Lord You know

I will do what You want me to; It's not my will, but Yours
I will do what You want me to; It's not my will

I will go where You want me to; Use me, use me
I will go where You want me to; Just say the word and Lord You know

I'll say yes
Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes
Just say the word and Lord You know.⁷

VIII. Making It a Memorable Learning Moment

A. Hold a “**What If I Never Marry Forum.**” The fact of the matter is that many of today’s singles, especially African American women, will never marry, and some do not wish to marry. The statistics are clear and incontrovertible. As I said earlier, it’s time that the statistics are known by the Church. Also, it’s time that we discuss what this means for: women, men, the Church, the way singles are viewed in churches, caring for single people who are aged and infirmed who do not have children and families to care for them, and the way we discuss sex. Bring in experts who have studied and written on the issues. Also bring in persons who are well-achieved but have been single and never married and people who are divorced and will never re-marry. Advertise the event on Facebook, Twitter, and all media in your area.

B. For an interesting and thought-provoking learning moment, host a **Date Night** for all the singles in your church and the community. Create special invitations and creative advertisements aimed at your target group. Set an atmosphere that is conducive to networking, mixing, and mingling by serving dinner or hors d’oeuvres. Be sure to highlight the screening of a great film and provide an open forum for discussion following the screening. Make sure that the event is well structured but still a lot of fun. Advertise the event on Facebook, Twitter, and all media in your area.

C. Develop a singles program that respects and includes all of the major diverse segments of the singles community; young, middle-age, senior, divorced, single by choice, widowed, etc.

D. Adopt and implement a church resolution that requires every department and program in the church to accept and respond to the needs of the diverse singles community.

Notes

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2. "Man-in-the-House rule." The Free Dictionary. Online location: <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Man-in-the-House+Rule> activate webpage accessed 15 January 2010
3. Spraggins, Renee. We the People: Women and Men in the United States. Census 2000 Special Report. United States. Bureau of the Census. Department of Commerce. 2005. Online location: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-20.pdf> accessed 15 January 2010
4. Rivas, Jorge M. "Census Bureau: Singles Are Increasing Their Influence in America." Lifestyle. 18 July 2007. Online location: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/318338/census_bureau_singles_are_increasing.html accessed 15 January 2010
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6. "If You Can Use Anything Lord, You Can Use Me." Lyricstime.com. Online location: <http://www.lyricstime.com/gmwa-mass-choir-use-me-lyrics.html> accessed 15 January 2010
7. "Use Me." Lyricstime.com. Online location: <http://www.lyricsera.com/568203-lyric-Lamar+Campbell-Use+Me.html> accessed 15 January 2010