

ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

FEBRUARY 12/13

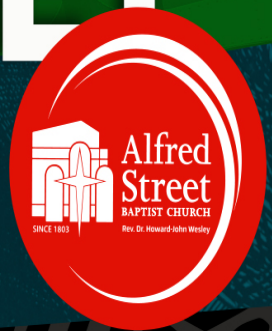
EXODUS 1:8-13 NRSV

LEST *We* FORGET

Part 1

A SERMON SERIES BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY | @PastorHJW

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Sunday, February 13, 2022

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley

Sermon: Lest We Forget



VILLAGE
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MOVING FROM CROWD TO COMMUNITY

CURRICULUM GUIDE



Sermon Summary

When we enter the Exodus text, we learn there is a new king of Egypt. Ahmose I has come to the throne declaring he knows nothing of the person or the work of Joseph. This Pharaoh acts as if the Israelites' presence and production has offered no benefit to Egypt. The point made in this text is that without knowledge of one's past, no wise course can be laid for one's future. Pharaoh cannot chart a wise course for Egypt because he does not know or acknowledge the truth of Egypt's past relationship with the Hebrew people. This blind spot leads Pharaoh to a ruinous relationship with the Israelites and their God, and ultimately is the cause of mass casualties for Egypt.

So it is in contemporary America. When leaders and citizens refuse to acknowledge the ugly and unjust parts of our nation's history, including the endemic and pervasive nature of systemic racism, America cannot lay an equitable and just course for her future.

In order to counter an incomplete story of America's relationship with black citizens, we must tell the current and coming generations all the truths of the national story, including the parts that are ungodly and painful. Citizens must teach our history in its fullness if we are to benefit from its lessons and construct a future based on truths. Lest we forget our past, we may stop our progress and find ourselves going backwards to a future that we do not want nor God does not intend. We must not forget. Instead, we must recall and retell the story of our people; a story full of faith, hope, power, and persistence

Key Points

1. The shame of the new Pharaoh in Exodus 1 is that he is ignorant of God, Joseph, and the contributions the Hebrew people made to Egypt.
2. A nation cannot thrive without the telling of its people's histories. In America, this includes the full story of African American people, including our history both before we arrived in America and since.
3. In particular, African American people must be equipped and ready to tell our stories, including the impact of systemic racism and the resilience of our people.
4. As we tell the fullness of the story to the generations that follow, they are empowered by their legacy to stand, succeed, and overcome great odds as their ancestors did.
5. Like the ancient Egyptians, if as a nation we will not speak the truth of our history, we will not move forward. We will go backwards toward a future not intended by God.

Getting To Know You Questions:

1. How would you describe your current condition in life and how did you get there? Do you know those who supported you through it all? How do you remember and celebrate them?
2. Every Sunday, Pastor Wesley begins his sermon with the words noted below. What do these words mean to you? How do they rest on your Spirit?
 - a. Grace and peace be unto you
 - b. From God who loves us as a father and mother
 - c. In Jesus Christ, who alone is our resurrected, risen, reigning and returning Redeemer.
3. Another frequent phrase of Pastor Wesley is, "It is not my job to make you think what I think. It is my job to make you think." What do you think about this role for a pastor? How does this differ from other churches you have experienced?

Into The Bible Questions:

1. For context, the word “remember” is used in the Bible almost 148 times. The first time it is used in the book of Exodus, Moses speaks it. In Exodus, the English word for remember is *zakar*. It means to call back from the past. How are we called to remember our history so that we might learn from it and teach it to generations to come?
2. Pastor describes “memory laws” as those laws the government puts in place to create a narrative where the truth is down played. Ahmose I created a new narrative by excising Joseph from the Egyptian history books. How did this benefit Pharaoh? What benefit might there have been for Pharaoh to acknowledge the truth of Joseph’s contributions?
3. Ahmose I’s fear of Israel led him to enslave the Hebrew people. This caused Egypt to move backwards. Are there parallels between this story and the modern American story? If so, how has the oppression of marginalized communities moved America backwards?
4. As an example of the impact of a lack of knowledge, Pastor Wesley says, “If you don't know anything about Medgar Evers, you might support voter suppression tactics.” Lack of knowledge can lead to bad behavior in any community.
 - a. What communal bad behaviors have you seen?
 - b. What role did the lack of knowledge play in allowing these behaviors?
 - c. Who should respond to communal bad behaviors and what role should the church play?





Life Application Questions:

1. Pastor Wesley says that if we forget, suppress, or deny the truth of our experiences, there is a problem. What do you think the problem is?
2. When the generations who follow you turn around and view your legacy, what will they see. What will your life have taught?
 - a. What specific lessons and values are you passing down?
 - b. How do you want your legacy to affect their future legacy?
3. The ability to chart the right course and go in the right direction is illustrated in Pastor's story about his eldest son, Deuce.
 - a. Have you ever found yourself mistakenly going in the wrong direction in life because you were unaware of what had come before? If so, what did you do?
 - b. How did recalibrating your direction reveal something about God?
4. Pastor describes an experience with his doctor that highlights the importance of knowing the medical history of one's family members. However, knowledge of the experiences of our family members extends beyond medical matters.
 - a. When you look at your family history, what lessons are there that you want to embrace and repeat?
 - b. What examples do you want to understand and not repeat?
5. Pastor notes, one of the saddest scriptures in the Bible is Exodus 5:2. In this verse Pharaoh says, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."
 - a. Was there ever a time in your life when you did not know the Lord? If so, how was your life different than it is now?
 - b. If someone, with the bravado of Pharaoh, says to you, I do not know or care about the Lord, how would you respond? What would your witness be
6. Toward the end of the sermon we hear this truth: to lose sight of how God has brought us through the ugly and the difficult is to lose sight of the faith that we need to walk through life. Please remember a moment when God brought you through. When you look back on that moment, how does God's ability to keep you then encourage you now?



"Can I Push It?"

1. Pastor Wesley points out that the sins of Ahmose I have a direct connection to the sins and punishment of Imhotep II. Although five generations passed between these two pharaohs of Egypt, the impact of one generation on the other is clear.
 - a. What truth about your family ancestry are you concealing and how might that secret impact you and your family today?
 - b. Do you see any negative patterns in your family history? If so, how do we acknowledge them and how might you change them?
 - c. What makes these patterns different from a generational curse?
2. Dialogue around the teaching of race and racism in the classroom has grown heated. Do you think the full histories of America (i.e, genocide against Native/ Indigenous people, crimes against the LGBTQIA+ community, and violence enacted against women, etc.) must be taught? Why or why not? If it is not taught, what is gained or lost?
3. Pastor Wesley points out the hypocrisy of a nation that is quick to criminalize the teaching of the history of race in America, but slow to enact laws that will alter the history of gun violence. Hypocrisy is the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform. Where else do you see hypocrisy in America, in the church, in your community, in your own home?



Activity:

Pastor mentions these dates: 1619, 1857, 1863, and 1919. Take a sheet of paper and list each date and write a sentence or two about the seminal events that took place in those years for the African American community. Look the dates up if need be. Once you complete your list, pray asking God to show you how you can enable African American communities to move forward and not backward.

Spirit Work:

Pastor Wesley reminds us that it is in the darkness that we see the glory of God most clearly. The Negro Spiritual, O Freedom, speaks to a dark moment, but the songwriter wants us to know that there is something beyond that dark moment. Listen to O Freedom and construct a prayer that encourages your spirit.

Additional Questions for Married Couples:

1. Lest we forget. When you look back over your married life, what are three moments that you must never forget?
 - a. Why are these three important?
 - b. What do they teach you about your relationship to one another, and to God?
2. Pastor speaks about the injury caused in relationships by a lack of historical knowledge. Are their parts of the current story of your family that are hidden away?
 - a. What would happen if you could tell the hidden stories?
 - b. Who would be enlightened or injured?
 - c. How do you create the space to hold all of these truths in order to benefit your family?

Additional Questions for Young Adults:

1. In what ways are untold stories a form of generational curses?
2. What is shifted when the stories and histories of your family are told by people outside of it?
3. Similarly, what happens when the truths of Black people are told by people outside of the community?
4. Social media can be a tool for selective truth-telling. How have you witnessed the impact of this on your relationships, beliefs, and motivations to leave a legacy?

Additional Questions for Parents:

1. Pastor noted that “we” must tell our children their story. Who do you believe is included in that “we”? Who do you place in the path of your children so that they may receive a fuller sense of the story of their people?
2. Are there things you do not want your children to know about your family history?
 - a. What are those things?
 - b. Why do you wish to withhold them?
 - c. What will this absence of knowledge allow your children to repeat family mistakes?
3. How did you learn the story of African American people in this nation?
 - a. Was it adequate? What was missing?
 - b. Based on your experience, what do you want to do differently to help your children gain a proper sense of the African American community?
4. Please share a favorite book, television show, or movie that you have used to help teach your children the story of who they are.

Additional Questions for Women:

1. Pastor notes that “there is a grave danger in forgetting, ignoring, or even suppressing the truth of your history and your story.” Thinking of the women in your family, what parts of their stories were forgotten, ignored or suppressed? What would happen if you brought their full stories to light?
2. This sermon takes up the legacy and impact of Joseph. Often, family legacies are based on bloodline relationships. However, the importance of fictive kinship in the black community must be taken into consideration. How do our old, patriarchal understandings of family leave out the impacts of “found families”, friendships, mentorships, and powerful relationships that push us to realize our highest potential?
3. 3. What do the legacies of single women look like, and what is lost when we don’t recognize them?

Additional Questions for Men:

1. Pastor shared with us an often-used quote of his father, the Rev. Dr. Alvin Wesley. Rev. Alvin Wesley shared this phrase every Sunday, "Thank God for memory." What does this mean to you? Do you thank God for your memory? Why or why not?
2. The title of this sermon, Lest We Forget is drawn from the song Lift Every Voice and Sing. The third verse includes this phrase, "Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee". What happens to a people when we forget our past?
 - a. What price do we pay?
 - b. What happens to an individual when he forgets the past?
 - c. Is it ever good to forget the past? Is it always bad?
3. Do you think it is important to know your own history? Why or why not?

Additional Questions for Returning Citizens

1. In the song Lift Every Voice and Sing, the first verse offers these words, "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us. Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us." When you think about the darkest times of your life, are there lessons of faith you learned? What about the present brings you hope?
2. Do you know how you ended up in the situation that had you bound and did you grow from it?

This sermon demonstrates the risk of not remembering the fullness of the past. In what ways can remembering empower us to make different choices?

3. Pastor Wesley notes the impact of systemic racism in the sermon. What impact has systemic racism had on mass incarceration?

Additional Resources

1. Pharaohs of Egypt
 - a. Pharaohs of Egypt, Ahmose I appears in dynasty 18.
2. Carter G. Woodson
 - a. From the archives of the NAACP Carter G. Woodson
3. Professor Derrick Bell. One voice behind Critical Race Theory
 - a. Professor Derrick Bell
4. A brief report on Dred Scott
 - a. Dred Scott