

ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

FEBRUARY 19/20

EXODUS 13:17-22 NIV

LEST *We* FORGET

Part II

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

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Sunday, February 20, 2022 **Preacher:**

Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley **Sermon:**

Lest We Forget - Part 2



VILLAGE
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MOVING FROM CROWD TO COMMUNITY

CURRICULUM GUIDE



Sermon Summary

Pastor Wesley opens this sermon reminding us that there is danger in raising a generation of people who are ignorant, deny, reject, or suppress the truth of their own history. He invites us to consider the Ghanaian Adinkra symbol, *Sankofa*. This bird, whose feet face forward into the future, simultaneously looks back to remember and retrieve that which is past and important. The spirit of *Sankofa* is operating in the story of Moses in Exodus 13. As Moses prepares to lead the children of God out of Egypt, he has a *Sankofa* moment. Moses, with his feet facing forward, looks back and retrieves the bones of his ancestor, Joseph.



Why does Moses spend precious time retrieving bones that are over 430 years old? The simple answer is, because as Joseph lay dying he made his brothers promise to take his bones with them, when God allows them to leave Egypt. Moses is faithful to the promise made to Joseph. He recognizes that by retrieving Joseph's bones he is being faithful to God's assignment to honor our ancestors and to understand the connection between our lives and theirs. Pastor Wesley says, "... we must remember and honor our ancestors because we are the living manifestation of their prayers and dreams."

As we look back at our past, the sermon reminds us each generation must answer the question, "...what from our past must we go back and retrieve and what should we leave"? Pastor Wesley suggests leaving behind homophobia, materialism, corporeal punishment of our children, and sexism. However, in a *Sankofa* moment, he urges us to retrieve an understanding of the "imago dei", the image of God in all people. With this belief, God's people will see the other as neighbor, care for the least among us, and see the image of God in all humanity. The sermon ends challenging us to consider what from our past will we take into our future and what will we leave behind.

Key Points

1. The Ghanaian symbol of *Sankofa* reminds us that we must look backwards, retrieving what is precious, in order to go forward.
2. Your future is directly impacted by knowing your connection and responsibility to those who came before you.
3. Every generation must ask and answer the question, "...what do I bring with me into my future and what will I leave behind?"
4. God is faithful to "their" covenant promises to us. In turn, we must be faithful to our promises to God.

Getting To Know You Questions:

1. In this sermon, Pastor Wesley focuses on the importance of remembering on whose shoulders we stand. In honor of those who came before us, share a story of a historical figure from world history who has had an impact on your life whether directly or indirectly.
2. Is there an inspiring story from your legacy that exemplifies a treasured value or a cherished characteristic? Briefly share a bit of the story, connecting it to the value that was passed down to you.
3. What is one precious item that you would take from your home as you flee for safety, and why?

Into The Bible Questions:

1. Joseph and Moses never met. There were 430 years between their lives. What did Pastor Wesley say about how Moses knew Joseph? Recall or re-read the birth story of Moses found in Exodus 2:1-10.
 - a. How does this story relate to us as we struggle with telling the entire history of the United States?
 - b. It's been at least 400 years since the first Africans were brought as enslaved people to the Americas. What and how are we called to remember their lives (see other resources below)?

2. Exodus 20:12 states, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." How did Pastor Wesley relate this commandment to us and our treatment of the elders?

3. Read the story of Joseph's death in Genesis 50:22-26. Joseph asks his brothers to keep a promise, based on a promise God made to him. What promises, made in the Bible, are important to you? Why are they important to you?





Life Application Questions:

1. Looking back over the last five years of your life, is there a moment when you learned the value of something in your past? What did you learn? How is that lesson positioning you to move into your future?
2. Moses and the children of Israel didn't take the bones of Joseph's brothers. Pastor Wesley admonished that when walking towards the future, sometimes you have to leave things behind. What are some things that you need to leave behind in order to embrace the future that God has for you?
3. Pastor Wesley notes that "Those who have held you captive never freely release you." Is there something in your past that has held you captive? Are you free of it? How did you obtain your freedom? What did you learn from this experience?
4. Pastor Wesley says by opening our hearts to and accepting Jesus we made some promises. When you chose to follow Christ, what promises do you believe you made? Which ones are hard to keep, which ones are easier to keep? How do you strengthen your own spirit to be able to keep the promises you made?
5. Everyone has both a nationality, the place you are from, and an ethnicity, the people you are from, all manner of beauty from across the globe. The Apostle Paul tells us we are citizens not of this place but of heaven (Philippians 3:20). If someone asked you to identify who you are, what are the three most important descriptors you would list? Who are you and who are your people?



"Can I Push It?"

1. Pastor Wesley begins the sermon by saying there is a danger in raising a generation who is ignorant of, denies, rejects, or suppresses the truth of their own history. How might people of color and white people hear this statement differently? How could one's social location shift the way this question lands?
2. What did Pastor Wesley say regarding honoring parents and elders who did not treat us the way we desired to be treated? What are the challenges and opportunities in honoring them? Is there a way you could honor them without dishonoring yourself or ignoring your own self care? What would that look like for you?
3. Personal privilege and communal engagement can sometimes clash. Pastor says it is ok to have the finest of "Egypt" but do not choose privilege over your people. When have you selfishly chosen privilege over people? When did you realize that was what you had done? What did you learn from it? Has this experience led you to doing anything differently?
4. Pastor Wesley invites us to think about the things we will leave in the past as individuals. What do you think we, as the Church, are called to leave in our past?



Activity:

1. You have been tasked with creating a time capsule of stories to share with future generations. Take a few moments to brainstorm 3-5 story ideas. They can be personal or public stories. Then, as a group, share your individual lists with each other. As time permits, some people may want to share some of your stories in detail.
2. Time for reflection is not high on the list of a typical teenager's "to do's". However, the opportunity to look back is important at every age. Engage your teenager in a conversation where you ask them to look back over the last year and identify an important lesson they have learned that they want to take with them. In this conversation, share what you have learned and wish to take forward with you, as well.

Spirit Work:

1. Sit with God in prayer and ask if there is a Joseph in your life who you need to connect with and honor despite the status of your relationship. What work do you need to do internally before you connect with and honor your Joseph?
2. Sankofa is only one of the symbols of the Ghanaian Adinkra symbol system. The National Park Service offers a lesson on these symbols. Review the NPS site and select another Adinkra symbol that speaks to you. Create a prayer using this symbol as the centerpiece of the prayer. <https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/adinkra-symbols.htm>

Additional Questions for Married Couples:

1. Think about your family of origin. What are two things you want to bring into your marriage from your family of origin and two things you want to leave behind?
2. Pastor Wesley says that he is taking into his future the concept of the “imago dei”. When you look at your spouse, how do you see the image of God reflected in that person? What would happen if you told them that you see God manifest in them in this particular way?
3. In his opening prayer, Pastor Wesley said, “Let there be no gap between your will and my words.” When you are angry or upset with your spouse, what would happen if this prayer preceded anything you said to them? How might this prayer change you?

Additional Questions for Young Adults:

1. Who or what has been your best “history teacher”? How have you learned the lessons of your ancestors? How are you teaching those who come after you?
2. Pastor Wesley always says he does not want us to think what he thinks. He wants us to think for ourselves. How does social media help you to think for yourself? How does it mitigate against this? What are the best ways to use social media to create an informed, thinking, curious generation?
3. Pastor Wesley levels a challenge at each of us. He says, “Don’t let what they did not do, cause you to not do what God has called you to do.” While he is talking specifically about parents, this challenge finds solid ground in all relationships. How can you operate in the will of God, even when others engage with you outside of that will? How do we avoid letting the behavior of others dictate our behavior?

Additional Questions for Parents:

1. Ask your child to tell you about a relative they admire, and why? Based on their response to you, what values do you believe your family member is passing on to your child? How does that make you feel?
2. It was 430 years from the time of Joseph to the time of Moses. Promises made centuries before come to fruition in a new era. How do we help our children understand that some promises take longer than others? How do we help them build for a future they cannot yet see? (see resources below for children)
3. Pastor Wesley says that he does not want us to think as he does, but simply to think. As a parent, how do you decide when or whether to subscribe to this with your children? How do you teach them to think for themselves?

Additional Questions for Men:

1. Pastor invites us to listen to how the promise is worded by Joseph before his death. In Exodus 13:19 Joseph says, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." He emphasized the faith Joseph had to say that WHEN God comes, take my bones with you. Moses knew he was the fulfillment of Joseph because Jochebed (his mother) taught him, even though he was raised as an Egyptian.
 - a. Did your parents or grandparents speak of "your Joseph" in your family
 - b. How did that history shape you as you matured into a man? Do you share that history with your children and how?
2. Who is (was) your Joseph? How have you chosen to take them forward with you Lest We Forget?
3. It was noted in this message that each generation must answer the question, "...what is in our past that we must go back and retrieve and what is in our past that we wish to leave behind?" What are two things from your past you must retrieve and two things from your past you must leave behind?

Additional Questions for Women:

1. The black church has not always been kind, open or welcoming to women. We have had to cover our bodies for fear of tempting men. We have been told red nail polish, shoes or lipstick are not proper attire for church. And we have been told, and in some places are still being told, the pulpit and the preached word are not our purview. What happened in your body when you heard Pastor Wesley say he was leaving sexism behind?
2. Pastor Wesley was clear in his belief in the equality of women. How has the issue of discrimination shown up in your life? Share a challenge or a victory. How has God kept you in challenging times? How has God led you to victory in the face of discrimination?
3. While pastor focuses on Exodus 13:19, the two verses preceding his emphasis verse notes God took the Hebrew people the long way around to the Red Sea. Sometimes the most direct route to a destination is not the best route. Have you ever gone “the long way round” and found that route the best one? If so, what made it a more efficacious route?
4. Biblical roles for daughters are wide and varied. In Exodus 2:7, we witness Miriam, Moses’ sister and the maid of Pharaoh's daughter, use her influence and position to support the wishes of Egypt’s royal daughter. She also secures her family’s legacy, her brother’s food, and her mother’s financial stability. In what ways do the daughters of your family create and sustain legacies of the family, and of their own?
5. How does this patriarchal dialogue prevent women from seeing the imago dei in themselves?

Additional Questions for Returning Citizens

1. Has there been a formerly incarcerated person who has positively impacted your life? What impact has their story had on your life?
2. When you think of the experience of your incarceration, was there anything that you were able to go back and retrieve, anything that you can remember, helped you become a better person?
3. What lesson from this message have you learned that could impact breaking the cycle or the generational curse of mass incarceration?
4. Pastor Wesley notes that “Those who have held you captive never freely release you.” How does this country's parole guidelines compare to this statement?

Additional Resources

1. Sweet Honey In the Rock has an excellent song that speaks to our being the manifestation of our ancestors dreams. Click here if you would like to hear, We Are. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWaw-tQ4W7w>
The chorus is:
We are our grandmother's prayers.
We are our grandfather's dreams.
We are the breath of the ancestors.
We are the Spirit of God.
2. Moses' mother, Jochebed is mentioned, by name, in Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59. This slave woman raised Aaron, the first priest, Miriam, the one who helped her brother Moses lead and Moses. From the humility of slavery, this woman did great things! For more information on Jocabed, please click here. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jochebed-bible>
3. One way to understand our history is to read the words of those who lived it. Please see the following link to a collection of slave narratives collected by the Library of Congress. About this Collection | Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938 | Digital Collections | Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/>
4. Story is a powerful tool for sharing our history with children. An African Folktale is an exhibit of the Smithsonian Institute. The description of the exhibit follows. Since artists' books are not normally associated with African art, our goal in this exhibition is to introduce the genre and survey its “African” manifestations. The featured books are from the Smithsonian Libraries' Warren M. Robbins Library at the National Museum of African Art and the National Museum of African Art collection. <https://library.si.edu/exhibition/artists-books-and-africa/african-folktale-full>