



ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA
5 Pentecost - Proper 8 - Year C - June 30/July 1, 2007
1 Kings 19:1`5-16, 19-21; Ps. 16; Galatians 5:1,13-25; Luke 9:51-62
Preacher:
The Reverend William H. Stokes, *Rector*

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...
(Galatians 5:1)

Last Monday, our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori was in Jamestown, Virginia to celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the Jamestown Settlement....The Jamestown Settlement was the first English settlement in what would become the United States. Because it was a settlement of the Crown, it brought the Crown's religion - Church of England...As a consequence, we Episcopalians have a particular connection with that settlement...Our maternal Anglican roots are there, which is why the Presiding Bishop was in Jamestown last week celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement.....

In her sermon at Jamestown, the Presiding Bishop spoke of the "national search for the meaning of this place."¹ She asked: "What does it mean to be a Christian in this nation? What stories and values do we claim from the history of this place? What do we remember about this beginning, and how does it continue to shape our lives today?"² I appreciated her asking those questions....I think they are vitally important....

In that sermon at Jamestown, the Presiding Bishop recognized that sometimes the stories are about evil....She stated, "The evil tales sometimes are truly evil."³ About Jamestown she acknowledged, "This place reeks with the origins of the slave trade in this land, begun here in 1619 to facilitate the tobacco trade. That history is not yet fully redeemed, even though the church which sanctioned slavery was later instrumental in its dismantling." "The work is not yet over," she stated, "and that work is certainly before us in the fifth century of our presence here." "Yet," she said, "Episcopalians in Virginia, together with Anglicans in Ghana and in Liverpool, have begun to build a triangle of hope to counter the old and evil tales of a triangle of shame and horror – slaves bought for the price of goods brought from England to Ghana, and later sold on these shores. Reconciliation is emerging from the evils of a terrible past."⁴

"Our task," Jefferts Schori said, "is to take up that gospel search for hope, and the promise of new life among what others believe lost, whether evil tales or human beings. This next century will continue to call us in all humility to redeem the evil tales and deeds of the past, with the very tools of the gospel that have been so misused."⁵ She concluded, "Our task is neither to ignore the evil tales, nor to see them in isolation. Our task is to humbly search for the seeds of the good news planted in this place 400 years ago, seeds not yet all grown to maturity, seeds of which some are bearing abundant fruit. Our task is to insist that the lost can yet be found, that new life can yet grow out of stories others deem wholly evil."⁶

I appreciated the Presiding Bishop's ability to capture the complexities, paradoxes and ambiguities of history.... We have seen that over and over again in American history....Think about the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the 231st anniversary of which we will observe and celebrate this coming Wednesday – that most core document of American freedom and liberties, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights - that among these are the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness....."

My heart thrills every time I read or hear those words...I hope yours does too....And yet...and yet....When the words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." were written and passed by the Continental Congress, the equality referred to in the document extended only to all white men who were landowners.....This sense of equality did not refer to Native Americans.... It did not extend to women, and it certainly

did not refer to black slaves.....

In fact we know, that Thomas Jefferson, himself a slave owner, and likely as well the father of slave children, tried to insert a line into the Declaration of Independence condemning slavery.⁷ The line read, "He [meaning King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither..."⁸ It was a factual statement of truth, and yet it was rejected by the Continental Congress because the "peculiar institution" of slavery was seen as essential to the economy of both the north and the south....

In 1846, Dred Scott, a 62-year-old slave went to court in St. Louis petitioning for his freedom on the ground that he had lived in Illinois, a territory where slavery was forbidden. As the on-line encyclopedia, Wikipedia notes, "In a sweeping decision that set the United States on course for Civil War, the Supreme Court denied Scott his freedom. The court ruled that Dred Scott was not a citizen who had a right to sue in the Federal courts, and that Congress had no constitutional power to pass the Missouri Compromise."⁹ The decision, written by 79-year-old Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney, barred slaves and their descendants from citizenship.

The evil institution of slavery, sanctioned by this country, sanctioned by our government and people, would continue until an Executive Order – *The Emancipation Proclamation* was issued on January 1, 1863. Even then, *The Emancipation Proclamation* did not end black slavery in this country. It did not free slaves in the border states of Kentucky, Missouri, Delaware, Maryland or West Virginia. ...It did not free slaves in southern states under Union control.....But as the Union became victorious, slaves were increasingly freed until slavery was officially ended in July of 1865....

Though there were incredible acts of grace and faith and courage and redemption among blacks and whites as slavery was dismantled, the history of that evil was not immediately redeemed....The United States Government and the governments of the individual states never formally apologized for slavery and never took steps to offer reparations or other forms of restorative justice...There was nothing done as was later done with interred Japanese after World War II, or with Native Americans in land grants, to compensate slaves or their descendants both for the brutality of slavery and the consequences of its economic, educational and legal injustice over time.

Of all the fifty states, only Virginia through its General Assembly passed a joint resolution acknowledging "with profound regret the involuntary servitude of Africans and the exploitation of Native Americans, and call for reconciliation among all Virginians." They passed this joint resolution on February 24, 2007 as part of the 400th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown,¹⁰ 142 years after slavery formally ended in 1865...¹¹.

And even though the formal and government sanctioned institution of slavery was abolished by 1865, many historians and sociologists would argue that black and white slavery continued, through indentured servitude tied to land and subsistence farming....We still see some of that today even in the State of Florida, as migrant farmers often find themselves working in what amounts to modern day slavery....

For decades, many white homes had black servants – maids and cooks and nannies – who were paid the lowest of wages...I recently read one account of a nanny who was paid \$10.00 a week in 1930, about \$140.00 in today's economy¹²....That was not exceptional....As a child, I remember our Nanny, Rosalie, who we called "Rofie," not Mrs. So- and So, to this day I don't know what her last name was...I am confident that her wages, though in keeping with the practices of the times, were not fair....

Jim Crow and Segregation are a part of the legacy of slavery and the living community memory of this church....There are those of you who remember when Doc's All American had a "Whites Only" drinking fountain....You remember two separate and unequal high schools - Carver for blacks and Seacrest for whites....You remember slums made up of crowded rows of so-called "shot gun" houses. I have, on occasion, heard elderly members of this church refer to the area surrounding St. Paul's as "colored town." It wasn't until the late 1960's that the blacks were allowed on the beach at Atlantic Avenue in this All American City...

No doubt much good has been done here....Delray Beach has worked hard at race relations and important progress has been made....The intentionality of Delray Beach around the issues of race and justice was an important component that attracted me when I accepted the call to be Rector of this Church and I am proud to say that we have been leaders in the City's conversation and actions around racial healing and reconciliation....

Nonetheless, the playing field in this community and throughout our nation has historically not been equal...It is still not equal...Too many blacks live in substandard housing....Too many black children are receiving substandard education....The number of black children who live in poverty is high...The medical care that blacks receive is well below the level of that for whites....The average salary of black workers is still less than that of whites...The number of black executives in this nation is still disproportionately low.... The per capita incarceration rate of black males far exceeds that of whites and an indictment of the judicial and legislative system and inherent racism which contributes to this was featured as a front page story in today's Palm Beach Post¹³....And on and on and on....

Much of this is the result and fallout of that "peculiar institution" of slavery and our nation's unwillingness to fully redress that wrong over time.... This has haunted, scarred and marred our country from its origins and while there have been and continue to be other evils and injuries done to people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, without doubt transatlantic slavery and this country's treatment of African Americans and Native Americans stand out as the two primary societal sins that have visited effects upon the children and the children's children and the children's children's children.... The work of redeeming this history has a long way to go.....

We should all, therefore, be deeply concerned by the Supreme Court's very split decision this past week in the case of *Parents Involved in Community Schools et. al vs. Seattle School District*¹⁴ as well as other patterns in our country over the past two decades which appear to be dismantling the many strides forward made by the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s...

During his confirmation hearings, the Chief Justice assured the Senate and the American people that he was a strong believer in *stare decisis* - the principle which states a court should not overturn its own precedents without a persuasive reason¹⁵....As the dissenting minority argued passionately this past week, the court is undermining the historic precedent of *Brown vs. Board of Education*...¹⁶ We have a sacred obligation as Christians and as citizens to ask if the reasoning behind the courts decision was persuasive....

The Robert's Court decision this past week proceeded from an assumption that the Constitution is color blind, and that the history of the Constitution's previous treatment of blacks in this country has been redeemed¹⁷....This assumption is false. Any notion¹⁷ of the Constitution's or the Supreme Court's supposed "color blindness" cannot even be considered before 1952 and *Brown vs. Board of Education*. This past week's decision ignores the fact that for much of United States history the Constitution has not been color blind at all....Blacks were not afforded rights as persons when the Constitution was drafted....Dred Scott's color was very much a factor when it was determined he was not a citizen in that famous Supreme Court decision....The 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* established formal segregation and upheld the doctrine of "Separate but equal" and the effects of the transatlantic slave trade on African-Americans has never been fully remedied....As a result, institutional and systemic racism is built into every fabric and infrastructure of our government and our society, including, by the way, our churches...To begin to think that 350 years of constitutionally and legislatively embedded racism has been cleaned up in the 52 years since the *Brown* decision is fiction.

Some of you are, perhaps thinking that this is all about politics and that church is no place to address it....But this is not merely about politics, it is about justice and justice is a profoundly religious concern...It is a profoundly religious concern, because it is a primary concern of God and a central biblical demand....Scripture is pointed and clear about this....

Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever rolling stream, the prophet Amos cries out...(Amos 5:24)

What does the Lord require of you, the prophet Micah so famously asks, "but to do justice and to love

kindness and to walk humbly with your God....(Micah 6:8)

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus proclaimed in a synagogue, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"* (Luke 4:18-19).

In our Baptismal Covenant, every one of us promises "to persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin to repent and return to the Lord, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbors as ourselves....to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being...." (BCP 305 - 305).

The mission of the Church is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" (BCP - 855)... It's about healing...It's about reconciliation...It's about justice.....

When we allow ourselves the convenience of historical amnesia, failing to remember the evils that have marred and scarred our history and us; when we fail, not only to acknowledge that the evils of this history have not yet been redeemed and continue to visit consequences upon the children of slaves and their children's children to the fourth, fifth, tenth and eleventh generation; when we fail to demand from our government policies and laws and court decisions that redress those wrongs and right the perpetual injustices that have resulted, then we, as a society, continue to perpetuate the sin of the original evil....

As ethicist and theologian Donald W. Schriver, Jr. Dean of Union Theological Seminary in New York has written in his very fine book, *Honest Patriots: Loving a Country Enough to Remember Its Misdeeds*, "What a government *permits or authorizes* by action or inaction of its officers has implications for the continuing liabilities of that government transgenerationally....A government that facilitates or fails to prevent murder should no more be protected by statutes of limitations than individual murderers. For government and every other collective human affair, time does not heal all wounds. Only some institutionally enacted therapy – rehabilitation, compensation, reparations – heals...."¹⁸

As Christians we are to be "repairers of the breach."¹⁹ This past week, the Supreme Court issued a decision that opens the ancient wound and opposes healing...

As we prepare to observe and celebrate this nation's Independence, as the words "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights - that among these are the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," let's celebrate the incredible beauty and freedom of our country...Let us celebrate our nations magnanimity and generosity...Let us celebrate our love of freedom and our courage to help bring freedom about for ourselves and for peoples around the world.

But let us also recognize that we are not the America we could be...Let us acknowledge that our history is still in the process of being redeemed and that this is especially true in the area of race relations and the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade on our history and on our lives. In the spirit of our Baptismal Covenant, in the demands of our faith and of God, let us renew our resolve to level the playing field, to do justice and to love kindness, to walk humbly with our God...." (Micah 6:8)

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

(Galatians 5:1, 13-14)

1. Jefferts Schori, Katharine "Sermon Preached on the 400th Anniversary Celebration at Jamestown, Virginia. See http://www.episcopalchurch.org/78703_87227_ENG_HTML.htm

2. See above

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3. See above
 4. See above
 5. See above
 6. See above
 7. See Wikipedia “Declaration of Independence” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence
 8. See above
 9. See Wikipedia “Dred Scott” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dred_Scott
 10. See Wikipedia “Slavery in the United States” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_the_United_States
 11. See above
 12. Shriver, Jr, Donald W *Honest Patriots: Loving a Country Enough to Remember its Misdeeds* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 129
 13. See “Drug Free Zones Target Blacks Unfairly Critics Say’ in the Palm Beach Post, Sunday, July 1, 2007 or at <http://www.palmbeachpost.com/search/search/Drgg+Free+Zones/UnifiedSearch?query=Drgg+Free+Zones&collection=site>
 14. The full text of the decision can be found on-line at <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-908.pdf>
 15. As CNN reported ,”in the hearing, Roberts told Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-California, he would judge any challenge to Roe according to the principle of stare decisis, latin for ‘stand by a Latin decision,’ meaning courts are bound by previous decisions, or precedent.” See <http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/09/13/roberts.hearings/index.html>
 16. See the dissenting opinions of Justices Stevens and Breyer at <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-908.pdf>
 17. See the opinions of Roberts and Thomas at <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/06pdf/05-908.pdf>
 18. Shriver, Jr, Donald W *Honest Patriots: Loving a Country Enough to Remember its Misdeeds* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 149.
 19. See Resolution A123 “Slavery and Racial Reconciliation” passed by the 2006 General Convention of the Episcopal Church