

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany Sunday, February 09, 2020

The Collect: Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 58:1-12 read from the New Living Translation Bible

58 “Shout with the voice of a trumpet blast.

Shout aloud! Don't be timid.

Tell my people Israel of their sins!

2 Yet they act so pious!

They come to the Temple every day

and seem delighted to learn all about me.

They act like a righteous nation

that would never abandon the laws of its God.

They ask me to take action on their behalf,

pretending they want to be near me.

3 ‘We have fasted before you!’ they say.

‘Why aren't you impressed?’

We have been very hard on ourselves,

and you don't even notice it!’

“I will tell you why!” I respond.

“It's because you are fasting to please yourselves.

Even while you fast,

you keep oppressing your workers.

4 What good is fasting

when you keep on fighting and quarreling?

This kind of fasting

will never get you anywhere with me.

5 You humble yourselves

by going through the motions of penance,

bowing your heads

like reeds bending in the wind.

You dress in burlap

and cover yourselves with ashes.

Is this what you call fasting?

Do you really think this will please the Lord?

6 “No, this is the kind of fasting I want:

Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;

lighten the burden of those who work for you.

Let the oppressed go free,

and remove the chains that bind people.

7 Share your food with the hungry,

and give shelter to the homeless.

Give clothes to those who need them,

and do not hide from relatives who need your help.

8 “Then your salvation will come like the dawn,

and your wounds will quickly heal.

Your godliness will lead you forward,

and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.

9 Then when you call, the Lord will answer.

‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.

“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression.

Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!

10 Feed the hungry,

and help those in trouble.

Then your light will shine out from the darkness,

and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.

11 The Lord will guide you continually,

giving you water when you are dry

and restoring your strength.

You will be like a well-watered garden,

like an ever-flowing spring.

12 Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities.

Then you will be known as a builder of walls
and a restorer of homes.

Psalm 112:1-10 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

1 Hallelujah!

Happy are they who fear the Lord *
and have great delight in his commandments!

2 Their descendants will be mighty in the land; *
the generation of the upright will be blessed.

3 Wealth and riches will be in their house, *
and their righteousness will last for ever.

4 Light shines in the darkness for the upright; *
the righteous are merciful and full of compassion.

5 It is good for them to be generous in lending *
and to manage their affairs with justice.

6 For they will never be shaken; *
the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance.

7 They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; *
their heart is right;
they put their trust in the Lord.

8 Their heart is established and will not shrink, *
until they see their desire upon their enemies.

9 They have given freely to the poor, *
and their righteousness stands fast for ever;
they will hold up their head with honor.

10 The wicked will see it and be angry;
they will gnash their teeth and pine away; *
the desires of the wicked will perish.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 read from the New Revised Standard Version

2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

6 Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. 7 But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him”—

10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. 13 And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

14 Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

15 Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny.

16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

But we have the mind of Christ.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20 read from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

Anglicized

13 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

14 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

17 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. 18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On February 13th we remember Absalom Jones Priest. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Absalom Jones was born on November 6, 1746, a house slave in Delaware. He taught himself to read out of the New Testament, among other books. When sixteen, he was sold to a store owner in Philadelphia. There he attended a night school for blacks, operated by Quakers. At twenty, he married another slave, and purchased her freedom with his earnings.

Jones bought his own freedom in 1784. At St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, he served as lay minister for its black membership. The active evangelism of Jones and that of his friend, Richard Allen, greatly increased black membership at St. George's. The alarmed vestry decided to segregate blacks into an upstairs gallery, without notifying them. During a Sunday service when ushers attempted to remove them, the blacks indignantly walked out in a body.

In 1787, black Christians organized the Free African Society, the first organized Afro-American society, and Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were elected overseers. Members of the Society paid monthly dues for the benefit of those in need. The Society established communication with similar black groups in other cities. In 1792, the Society began to build a church, which was dedicated on July 17, 1794.

The African Church applied for membership in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania on the following conditions: 1, that they be received as an organized body; 2, that they have control over their local affairs; 3, that Absalom Jones be licensed as layreader, and, if qualified, be ordained as minister. In October 1794 it was admitted as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Bishop White ordained Jones as deacon in 1795 and as priest on September 21st, 1802.

Jones was an earnest preacher. He denounced slavery, and warned the oppressors to “clean their hands of slaves.” To him, God was the Father, who always acted on “behalf of the oppressed and distressed.” But it was his constant visiting and mild manner that made him beloved by his own flock and by the community. St. Thomas Church, Philadelphia, grew to over 500 members during its first year. Known as “the Black Bishop of The Episcopal Church,” Jones was an example of persistent faith in God and in the Church as God’s instrument.

Jones died on February 13th, 1818, in Philadelphia.

Let us pray: Set us free, heavenly Father, from every bond of prejudice and fear; that, honoring the steadfast courage of your servant Absalom Jones, we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God, which you have given us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**