

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 8

The Collect and Psalm will be read from the Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer
The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel will be read from the World English Bible

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

1 "Cry aloud! Don't spare!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Declare to my people their disobedience,
and to the house of Jacob their sins.

2 Yet they seek me daily,
and delight to know my ways.

As a nation that did righteousness,
and didn't forsake the ordinance of their God,
they ask of me righteous judgments.

They delight to draw near to God.

3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you don't see?
Why have we afflicted our soul, and you don't notice?'

"Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure,
and oppress all your laborers.

4 Behold, you fast for strife and contention,
and to strike with the fist of wickedness.

You don't fast today so as to make your voice to be heard on high.

5 Is this the fast that I have chosen?

A day for a man to humble his soul?

Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under himself?
Will you call this a fast,
and an acceptable day to Yahweh?

6 "Isn't this the fast that I have chosen:
to release the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and that you break every yoke?

7 Isn't it to distribute your bread to the hungry,
and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house?
When you see the naked,
that you cover him;
and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh?

8 Then your light will break out as the morning,
and your healing will appear quickly;
then your righteousness shall go before you,
and Yahweh's glory will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and Yahweh will answer.
You will cry for help, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Psalm: Psalm 112:1-10

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 2:1-12

1 When I came to you, brothers, I didn't come with excellence of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith wouldn't stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

6 We speak wisdom, however, among those who are full grown, yet a wisdom not of this world nor of the rulers of this world who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that has been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this world has known. For had they known it, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written,

“Things which an eye didn’t see, and an ear didn’t hear,
which didn’t enter into the heart of man,
these God has prepared for those who love him.”*

10 But to us, God revealed them through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes,
the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the things of a man except the spirit
of the man which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except God’s Spirit.
12 But we received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might
know the things that were freely given to us by God
Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

13 “You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted?
It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.

14 “You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can’t be hidden. 15 Neither do you
light a lamp and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are
in the house. 16 Even so, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good
works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

17 “Don’t think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn’t come to destroy, but to
fulfill. 18 For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one
smallest letter‡ or one tiny pen stroke§ shall in any way pass away from the law, until all
things are accomplished. 19 Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least
commandments and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven;
but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.
20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,
there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Gospel of the Lord

On February 13 we celebrate the life of 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 21, 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 13, 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.**