

“Exodus! Movement of Jah People”

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Decatur,
Georgia

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Holy Scriptures: Exodus 1: 8 – 2: 10

Exodus 1:8 - 2:10

^{1:8}Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶“When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” ¹⁷But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and

give birth before the midwife comes to them.” ²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

^{2:1}Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him, “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

Movement of Jah People

Bob Marley and the Wailers burst on the music scene in the 1970s.

Their music and philosophy have become a part of this global village we call earth.

The Wailers blended Rastafarian philosophy, Caribbean rhythms,
and universal love with their amazing talent as singers and
songwriters.

Their sound fits in the genre known as “message music.”

Bob Marley’s song, *Exodus: Movement of Jah People*

is a classic reggae anthem

intending to inspire people to work together for
justice and liberation.

He speaks of the movement of Jah people, of God’s people, to be free.

*“Open your eyes and look within: Are you satisfied (with the
life you're living)? We know where we're going! We know
where we're from. We're leaving Babylon, We're going to
our Fatherland. Exodus: movement of Jah people! Oh,
yeah!”*

Movement of Jah People

Dr. Jeanine Austin writes that one of her heroes is Henry David
Thoreau (1817-1862).

Thoreau always seemed to march to his own drummer,
no matter how wildly unpopular he was.

Most of us are frightened to death of being unpopular,
maybe because we often interpret unpopular as unworthy and
unlovable.

Thoreau was jailed in the 1840s after refusing to pay taxes
because he would not abide by the government’s Indian
Removal Act.

“His observations were based not on some philosophy he had read or
heard,

but on his own direct experience of feeling the outrage of
conformity,

and seeing the horrors of how Native Americans were

being treated...

He knew that the popular practice of removing Indians from their lands

was our very own Holocaust.”[1]

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a great friend of Thoreau’s, went to visit him in jail.

Emerson asked Thoreau, “*What are you doing in there?*”

Thoreau answered, “*More importantly, what are you doing OUT THERE?*”

Thoreau was challenging his friend to be more courageous and to stand up for what [both] knew to be right.

In the movie Annie Hall,

Diane Keaton’s character ponders how she would stand up against the Nazis.

Woody Allen’s character laughs and says,

“*Are you kidding? They would take your credit cards, and you’d cave.*” [2]

Movement of Jah People

“*Oh, Behave!*”

“Oh, behave!” is a funny, throw-away line in the “Austin Powers” movie,

something we remember and use to say to a friend in a light moment.

“Behave yourself!”

“Watch your manners!”

Good advice from parents and teachers to children and students.

Practice civility.

Learn our cultural mores.

Learn the rules and play accordingly.

Know what is expected of you, and then act “right”.

Our cultural behavior is taught to us explicitly and implicitly.

We learn how to act in an appropriate manner by listening and observing.

As you well know, organized religion and the regular practice of faith with one another

are positive ways to teach and maintain cultural mores, societal expectations, and common modes of acceptable behavior.

Here in the context of a loving faith community

we learn and we model

how to behave nicely, politely, humanely, and civilly.

Here we teach our children to respect themselves

and to respect their elders,

to recognize that they are made by God

and to recognize that everyone else is, too.

Here we ensure that everyone is made welcome,

that hospitality is the norm,

and that all souls are treated the same, with dignity and integrity.

Here we affirm that Jesus Christ invites us

first to belong to His fold,

then to believe in His love,

and finally to alter our behavior according to
His Word.

Yes, behavior modification, correction, and enhancement

are key components of the blessed union

of organized Christian religion and the practice of
Christian spirituality.

However, my friends, if we thought that the primary call and vocation

of the Church of Jesus Christ is to embody Emily Post
etiquette,

I can't imagine any of us would be here.

We don't ever allow the niceties and politeness and manners to fool
us or anyone else;

living and breathing and very much alive here

is a passion for justice.

While our religious practice and spirituality do indeed teach and
support social mores,

they also serve to inspire and inform,

instigate and integrate social action for the benefit of
humankind.

Movement of Jah People

“What does the Lord require of you?

*To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” –
Micah 6:8*

A personal conviction of morality is learned in the practice of religion.

A passion for justice is taught in classrooms,

expressed in worship,

and practiced in missions and our daily journey across
life.

Empathy and compassion

for the dispossessed and disinherited are learned here, in
Christ’s Church.

We are witnesses...

we are participants...

we are living, moving testaments of the power of God

to work in and through people united for a
common cause.

And sometimes, good behavior has very little to do with it.

Sometimes rules need to be broken because the rules are unfair.

Sometimes laws must be disobeyed because the laws themselves are
unjust.

Sometimes the principalities and powers that be

are to be defied for the greater sake of divine morality.

This is who we are.

We are a living, breathing movement that lives in the city and obeys just laws,

yet answers to a higher calling and holds all laws accountable to the Word of God.

Movement of Jah People

Jesus called his followers to join him on the Way, the Movement.

He invited folks to join him on the Way,

and he showed us the path to the Kingdom of God.

A movement is a collective drive toward a common goal,

often fed by a shared desire to shed a difficult past

and to grow into a brighter future.

We come from a long line of people of faith

who, when necessary and as a last resort,

have practiced civil disobedience at the risk of their lives and families

for the sake of others and for what is morally right.

The Church is founded on the faith and grace of Jesus Christ,

who defied the rules of the establishment

to heal the sick and free the oppressed.

The Protestant Church was inaugurated

from the courage of a reformer named Martin Luther,

who defied the Catholic Church's practice of selling blessings.

The Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ movements

were started on American soil when people of faith

proclaimed that the Lord's Table is to be open to one and all,

and that we are to have no creed but Christ.

We come by our conviction honestly, sincerely, faithfully.

Christian resistance of oppression and injustice is in our blood;

the need to be free and to free others,

to be liberated and to liberate the oppressed,

flows through our veins and sparks our spirits.

Movement of Jah People

In Exodus, our liberator Moses would have not lived,

and our Hebrew ancestors would have been wiped from the face of the earth

if the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah

had not defied the racist laws of the Pharaoh.

They were told to kill Hebrew boys at their birth,

yet the midwives refused, and let them live.

We can well imagine that there were some who said,

“Oh, behave! Be quiet. Do as you are told, and you will be safe.”

Clearly history has shown that Shiphrah and Puah refused to go along.

Moses' mother and sister also defied the order to practice genocide,

and hid the baby Moses,

and then set him in the reeds near where the Pharaoh's daughter bathed.

Even though Moses was raised in the Pharaoh's house,

he had compassion for his people.

When he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew,

Moses intervened and killed the Egyptian.

He fled into the wilderness.

God saw the suffering of God's children, and so God intervened.

God called Moses to serve as God's liberator.

Moses returned to defy and decry the law of the land

that some people could be enslaved while others benefited from their labors.

Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the wilderness,

always moving, moving toward the Promised Land.

Movement of Jah People

Movements for justice, mercy, and righteousness

often start with a few souls who stand up for what is morally right,

who refuse to capitulate to the wrong,

even and especially if the wrong is socially acceptable.

We can well imagine that one day a religious soul told Rosa Parks to behave.

Was there a spirit-filled Mississippian who asked Fannie Lou Hamer to be quiet?

Did a Christian in Atlanta ask John Lewis to stay quietly at home,

to not cross a bridge in Alabama or to not speak the truth in love in Congress?

By chance did a well-intentioned follower of God ask Mary Frances Early

to withdraw her application to the University of Georgia?

How about Corazon Aquino and the People Power Movement in the Philippines,

the Mothers of the Disappeared in El Salvador, Chile, and Argentina,

and the students and workers in Tiananman Square in
China?

Surely they were all told to behave,

yet they chose instead to believe,

knowing deep down inside that everyone belongs

to the One who created and creates.

They followed their religious and spiritual convictions,

and the world has never been the same.

Movement of Jah People

On February 1, 1960,

four Black freshmen from North Carolina Agricultural and
Technical College

walked up to the lunch counter of the Woolworth's five-
and-ten

in the city of Greensboro, North Carolina,

sat down, and demanded service.

For five days they and others who joined them sat there

while Woolworth's [staff] refused to serve them

a hamburger, a coke, even a cup of coffee – because of
their race.

[While the four Christian men sat peacefully and patiently, awaiting
service,

their white Christian neighbors heaped upon them abuse and ketchup,

and called them everything but a child of God.]

On the sixth day,

the store owners announced that they were temporarily closing down.

Anyone who thought the new “sit-in” movement would die then and there was mistaken.

The movement grew and it deepened.

In the decade and more that followed,

African Americans won the right

to sit down and have drink coffee in any restaurant.

But more important, movements for much more radical goals

[and fundamental civil and human rights] emerged among [people of all races],

among students and soldiers, among women,

and altogether among millions of Americans [and neighbors around the world].[3]

Of the Lunch Counter Sit-In Movement,

someone said, *“They should have served that cup of coffee.”*

They should have served that cup of coffee.

Maybe, maybe.

However, God's movement is never satisfied with crumbs and cups of java.

You and I know that the conviction for justice that burns within us
would not – and will not – stop at a cup of coffee.

Divine justice does not settle.

We'll start with a cup and move on to fair trade.

Saul Alinsky said his plan for ending slums

was to get rid of four-legged rats so he could move on to two-legged ones.

God's movement will not stop until every soul is free,

until human trafficking is in the past,

until civil rights are granted to every family, whether straight or gay,

until every refugee can safely return to their homeland,

and while they wait may they find a home and hope,

until every child of God has equal opportunity and access

“to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Movement of Jah People

In what ways is God calling us as a Church, a community, and as Christian citizens

to stand up to support others?

How are we to respond when fellow Americans are told they can't vote,

or are stricken from the polls, even though they have every right to vote?

Do we remain silent at the water cooler at work when a human being is called illegal?

How do we respond when the civil rights of families in the majority matter more than the civil rights of families in the minority?

Do we care more about a fistful of dollars in our pockets than we do the health care of 30 million impoverished Americans?

Ask yourself: What issues and concerns and justice issues is God calling me to address?

Who am I called to stand up to, and to stand up for?

"I humbly challenge all of you (especially myself)

to do at least one courageous and loving thing that you know you must do." [4]

May the message and the music of Bob Marley

and the love of Jesus Christ

and the power of our Christian religious practices and spirituality

sing through our life together on the Way.

As Bob Marley said,

Open your eyes and look within: Are you satisfied with the life you're living? Exodus: movement of Jah people! Jah come to break down presson, Rule equality,

Wipe away transgression, Set the captives free.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1] *Wisdom of the Ages: 60 Days to Enlightenment* by Dr. W. Dyer, 113.

[2] “Courage” Blog By: Dr. Jeanine Austin, Via <http://www.divinecaroline.com/22188/68011-courage#ixzz29suaRbDN>

[3] “They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: 7 Radicals Remember the 60s”, Dick Cluster, South End Press, 1979, page xiii.

[4] Dr. Jeanine Austine.