



**Worship Service Theme: Dignity
Black History Month (February)**

Helpful Elements:

African cloths for decoration

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today. The month of February is Black History Month, a time to remember and celebrate the history and struggle of African-American people in our country that often gets overlooked. Today we'll be talking about **dignity**.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently, and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting "The Lord is My Shepherd" together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Hymns:

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

First reading: Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

Oh, How I love Jesus

Glory Glory

Second reading: From St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15 (1 Cor. 15:39-44, NTE):

³⁹ Not all physical objects have the same kind of physicality. There is one kind of physicality for humans, another kind for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. ⁴⁰ Some bodies belong in the heavens, and some on the earth; and the kind of glory appropriate for the ones in the heavens is different from the kind of glory appropriate for the ones on the earth. ...

⁴² That's what it's like with the resurrection of the dead. It is sown decaying, and raised undecaying. ⁴³ It is sown in shame, and raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, and raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown as the embodiment of ordinary nature, and raised as the embodiment of the spirit.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Hymns:

The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power

I'll Fly Away

Interactive Homily: Let's think a bit more about dignity.

- How do you feel when someone treats you with dignity?
 - You matter! You're important, worthwhile, special, respected.
- All life is precious; we care about animals and plants. But what do you think makes people different than all other life forms?
 - People are not merely collections of different kinds of cells – we have a soul, an essence that is eternal. We have the capacity to connect with the divine.
- Why do people *matter*? Do you think you or others matter because of your job, your bank account, your personality, or the color of your skin?
 - The first book of the Bible, Genesis, describes how God the Creator made everything and called everything good. And then God makes man and woman, and God calls them “very good” – and the only things that God says are made “in our image, male and female.”
 - This concept is called, in Latin, *imago Dei* [pronounced “ee-MAH-go day”], the image of God.
 - People matter because we, and we alone, are created according to the image of God. *God is at the center of who we are*; not anything in our physical bodies, not our capacities or abilities.
- Which people are made in the image of God? Just the rich ones? The white ones? The educated ones?
 - Every single person! A bank executive, a maid, a pilot, the person who sweeps the floors – even the most lowly person you ever meet – is a king or a queen, made in the image of God.
- What can change our status as made in the image of God?
 - *Nothing!* The status of humans as made according to God's image never changes, no matter what.
 - This is the essence of dignity: We are special, precious, worthwhile because of God's image in us.

In a sermon preached in 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The whole concept of the *imago dei*, ... the “image of God,” is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected. Not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has a capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity. And we must never forget this as a nation: there are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble

white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God. ...We must believe this and we must live by it."¹

Let us pray in silence for a moment, remembering the dignity of all people, and that we would always grow to reflect more of God's image in us: love, mercy, truth, and justice.

(Silent Prayer) ... Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Hymns:

He's Got the Whole World

I Am on the Battlefield

Third Reading: "Light of the World," a prayer by Rev. Alydia Smith²

Bright Shining Christ,

There is much for Black and Brown bodies to dread, here, in the Americas.

The trauma of the transatlantic slave trade

lives in our bodies.

The legacy of enslavement

lives in our systems.

But the thin gospel of oppression

could die in our worship.

If we choose to shine bravely, reflecting your glory,

if we choose to reject the lies of racism and White supremacy,

if we choose to dance...

make music ...

share pain ...

spread joy ...

¹ <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/american-dream-sermon-delivered-ebenezer-baptist-church>

² <https://united-church.ca/prayers/light-world>

wake up and be magic.
We can choose to fight for a better society, and
we can remember that
we are of the earth and of the stardust,
we are precious, loved, and called to shine bright,
like the stars we are made of and the Son that we follow.
Help us to make good choices.
Help us to shine brightly.
Amen.

Hymn:

This Little Light of Mine

Fourth Reading: A history of African American quilting, adapted from an article by Ellison Langford in Scalawag Magazine³ [*show large photos of these quilts*]

A spirit of originality has always threaded through the evolution of African-American quilting. One formerly enslaved Georgia woman's skill and creativity made her one of the most famous names in quilting. Harriet Powers was born in 1837 near Athens, Georgia. In 1886, she exhibited a quilt at the Athens Cotton Fair. Rather than patterned blocks, ...each square was decorated with appliquéd figures and symbols depicting different stories from the Bible. ... [The quilt] is now preserved at the Smithsonian.

A different kind of minimalism makes the quilts of Gee's Bend some of the most celebrated in textile history. Gee's Bend is a remote community southwest of Selma, Alabama. ... Historically, residents were the descendants of slaves who eventually became sharecroppers.

The quilts of Gee's Bend use long-established piecing methods from the European tradition, such as geometric blocks, in unorthodox ways to create novel patterns. The colorful rows of triangles and rectangles are irregular, and many quilts have uneven borders. Older quilts were made with scraps of flour sacks, denim coveralls, and worn-out dresses.

Today's Black quilters ... pull from several different traditions at once, incorporating techniques from Powers, Gee Bend, and European traditions. ... This is what gives modern African-American quilting its unique and vibrant style.

Hymns:

³ <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2019/12/black-quilters-georgia/>

**When the Saints Go Marching In
We Shall Overcome**

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his to face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology, Reprise

Thank you for being with me today. Happy Black History Month, especially for those of you with African or other Black heritage and ancestors. Go in peace.