



**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. In the United States, February is Black History Month, a time to remember and celebrate the history and struggle of our African American sisters and brothers. Today we'll be talking about **dignity**, based on all human beings bearing the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We'll also be singing a number of traditional spirituals from the Black church tradition.

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 Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

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

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

<sup>4</sup>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.

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

<sup>6</sup>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: John 4:3-14**

<sup>3</sup>[When Jesus left to go back to Galilee] ... he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup>So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar. ... <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup>When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ...<sup>9</sup>The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

<sup>10</sup>Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

<sup>11</sup>"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ... <sup>13</sup>Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

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

**Hymns:**

**Oh, How I love Jesus**

**Glory Glory**

**Second reading: Luke 19:1-10**

<sup>1</sup> Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

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. But I wonder what makes people different than all other forms of life? How are you different from a tree or a bug or a pumpkin?
  - We are not merely collections of different kinds of cells – people have a soul, an essence that is eternal.
  - Unlike other forms of life, people have a unique capacity to connect with the divine.
- Let's think about this: Why do people *matter*? For example, do you think you or others matter because of your job, your bank account, your personality, or the color of your skin?
  - Our dignity is established right at the beginning of God's story, 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."
  - In Latin, this concept is called *imago Dei* [pronounced "ee-MAH-go day"], the image of God.
  - 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 young ones? The educated ones?

- Every single person! A bank executive, a maid, a pilot, the person who sweeps the floors – every person you will ever meet is a king or a queen, made in the image of God.
- Let's look at our scripture stories today, of two outcasts:
  - The woman at the well – a Samaritan, part of a rival ethnic group that the Jews hated, and a woman “of ill repute.”
  - Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector (a Jew who worked for the Romans) ... and short!
- How do you think most people at the time treated the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus the tax collector?
  - Shunned, ridiculed, gossiped about, passed by
- Jesus often got into trouble because he ignored centuries of social norms to treat *all* people with dignity, especially people whom the rest of society scorned or shunned or ignored. How did Jesus treat Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman?
  - Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman, asks her for a drink, and gives her hope for living water.
  - Jesus looked up into the tree Zacchaeus had climbed, spoke directly to Zacchaeus, and chose to eat at Zacchaeus house.
    - Jesus sees these people, interacts with them lovingly and deeply, and changes their lives.
- What can change our status as made in the image of God?
  - *Nothing!* Our status as humans made according to God's image never changes, no matter what.
  - This is the essence of dignity: Like the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus, we are precious and we matter because of God's image in us.

In a sermon preached in 1965, the Reverend 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. [Each person] 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 [person] from a treble white to a bass black

is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every [person] is made in the image of God. ...We must believe this and we must live by it."<sup>1</sup>

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.

**(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 Smith<sup>2</sup>

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 ...

wake up and be magic.

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

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

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**  
**Nothing but the Blood of Jesus**

**Fourth Reading:** A history of African American quilting, adapted from an article by Ellison Langford in Scalawag Magazine<sup>3</sup>

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. ... [\[Harriet Powers's Bible quilt\]](#) is now preserved at the Smithsonian.

A different kind of minimalism makes the quilts of Gee's Bend [\[show large photos of these quilts\]](#) 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.

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:**  
**When the Saints Go Marching In**

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

## **We Shall Overcome**

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 as you receive the closing blessing.

**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**