

Thursday after Ash Wednesday, February 23, 2023

Recommended reading: pp. xvii-xxii, "Origins" (part one)

In her preface to the book, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes of her love of history. "History revealed the building blocks of the world I now inhabited, explaining how communities, institutions, relationships came to be. Learning history made the world make sense. It provided the key to decode all that I saw around me. Black people, however, were largely absent from the histories I read. The vision of the past I absorbed from school textbooks, television, and the local history museum depicted a world, perhaps a wistful one, where Black people did not really exist. This history rendered Black Americans, Black people on all the earth, inconsequential at best, invisible at worst.... We were not actors but acted upon. We were not contributors, just recipients. White people enslaved us, and white people freed us. Black people could choose to take advantage of that freedom or to squander it, as our depictions in the media seemed to suggest so many of us were doing."

Thus because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, the Jews established and accepted as a custom for themselves and their descendants and all who joined them, that without fail they would continue to observe these two days every year, as it was written and at the time appointed. These days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every family, province, and city... (Esther 9:26b-28a)

The book of Esther describes the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim, an annual commemoration of a time when God rescued the people through the agency of courageous individuals. Purim, like Passover, is an annual observance in people's homes and in their houses of worship, designed to keep the memory of the past relevant in the present. Our celebrations of Holy Communion are done "in remembrance" of what God has done for us in the death and resurrection of Christ. All of us ground our faith in the memory of what God has done for us in the past and the promise of what God will do today. That's why it's so important that our understanding of the past be as accurate as possible and that it describe the full truth of history.

Prayer

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we thank you that your presence and your commitment to us are unchanging. Give us the courage to look upon our history with our eyes fully open, to not be afraid of what the past can teach us. Show us how to learn from the past to create a better tomorrow. Amen.