

Tuesday after the Second Sunday in Lent, March 7, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 442, "August 29th, 2005", pp. 443-4, "Superdome", pp. 17-27, "Democracy" (part 2)

Nikole Hannah-Jones explores the irony of our nation's belief in and commitment to human freedom, even as slavery was an integral, albeit hidden, part of the formation of this belief and narrative. "White sons of Virginia initiated the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The primary authors were all enslavers. For the first fifty years of our nation, Southerners served as president for all but twelve years, and most of them were Virginians. No place shaped the Revolution and the country it birthed more than Virginia. And no place in the thirteen colonies was as strongly shaped by slavery. At the time of the Revolution, Virginia stood as the oldest, largest, wealthiest, and most influential of the colonies. It was Virginia that introduced African slavery into British North America, just twelve years after the first English settlers arrived. It was Virginia that first enshrined racialized chattel slavery into law, excluding Black people from all civic life and setting a precedent followed throughout the colonies. And it was Virginia tobacco, cultivated and harvested by enslaved workers, that was exported to help finance the Revolution."

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:17-22)

Moses spoke these words to the Israelites just before they were to enter the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey that God was about to share with them. Throughout the Hebrew bible, the prophets tried to remind the Israelite people of their history and many of the community rituals and festivals involve remembering that they were once slaves in Egypt. Why? Because God knows the proclivity of humanity is to dominate, to conquer, to turn to violence, to trust only in ourselves rather than the Creator who provides daily bread for all. Maybe, if the Israelites remembered what it was like to live as slaves, they would want to join God in creating a new kind of community, rooted in cooperation and communion, that would be a light to the nations.

Prayer

God of liberation and community, help us to remember and celebrate your provision. It is you who gives us the gift of land that is flowing with milk and honey for all its inhabitants. When we insist on staking claim to your gifts, remind us of who and whose we are. Amen.