

Monday after the Third Sunday in Lent, March 13, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 124, “November 7, 1775,” pp. 125-126, “Freedom...,” pp. 136-146, “Dispossession” (part one)

In chapter three of the book, Tiya Miles explores the links between slavery and the treatment of indigenous peoples by the American government. “George Washington...devised a federal policy that would avoid ‘exterminating’ Native people and focus instead on civilizing them, as this seemed the most humanitarian and effective way to bring them under U.S. authority and foster their eventual assimilation. The architects of the early American state were Age of Enlightenment thinkers who believed that Indigenous peoples had the intelligence and ability to assimilate into proper society, unlike Africans, whom they viewed as innately insufficient.... The policy demanded that Native men give up the bow for the plow, and that Native women cease farming corn and turn their attention to the domestic work of spinning thread, weaving cloth, and other ‘properly’ feminine activities. Native people were advised to adopt Christianity and begin producing ‘civilized crops’ like cotton.... And there was yet one more thing. Native communities were encouraged to adopt what had emerged as a defining characteristic of civilized euro-American society in the South: the enslavement of Black people.... Natives who enslaved people found favor with the U.S. government, garnering positive reviews in the federal agents’ reports and earning government contracts and military honors.”

Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck. My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent...We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty. Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”—my child, do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths; for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood. For in vain is the net baited while the bird is looking on; yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves! and set an ambush—for their own lives! Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.
(Proverbs 1:8-19)

Jesus said, “What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?” The book of Proverbs would agree; the opening chapter cautions us against the enticements of greedy people who care about wealth more than human lives. Eventually, their insatiable desire consumes even them. It seems inconceivable that a nation founded on principals of equality would promote human slavery to the citizens of a culture that had always held the greatest respect for creation. The tragedy is that some of them were lured into compromising their culture and their humanity.

Prayer

God of mercy, look with compassion upon us as we face our past sins with courage and determination. Give us the strength to learn from our mistakes and to make your kingdom values our new reality. Amen.