

AFRICAN AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Celebrating our Learning and our Connections
February 19, 2023

Prayer

Week 1 - *The Story of African American Ordination in the Episcopal Church*

We told parts of the story of African American ordination in the Episcopal Church. We placed these stories in the context of the larger struggle for African American recognition in the Church and in American society. Rev. Robert mentioned several tensions in play in the story.

Catholicity vs. Racial-Religious Identity
The Political vs. the Spiritual
Assertion and Advocacy vs. Aggression
Reconciliation and Assertion

Questions:

**Were there parts of the lives of Absalom Jones, Pauli Murray,
or Barbara Harris that you identified with?**

Were there parts of the story that inspired you?

Were there parts of the story that challenged you?

Are there ways that the four tensions listed above have found--or find--expression in your life?

Week 2 - “*Union of Black Episcopalians – What it Means for You and Me.*” An address
by Dr. Dawn Conley

Dr. Conley facilitated a conversation that introduced the UBE to the parish. She led us through naming the meanings words that the UBE incorporate into their mission and vision, such as diversity, inclusion, and advocacy. She shared several scripture passages that lay the biblical groundwork for diversity as a concern of God: Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Revelation 7:9-10, Colossians 1:16-17, and James 2:1-4.

Questions:

Did the words diversity, inclusion, and advocacy take any new meanings or nuances since that day?

What was one thing that was meaningful to you about the session?

Week 3 - African American Spirituality: Music and Contemplative Practice

Rev. Pam detailed the life of Howard Thurman, who served some time as the Canon Theologian for The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, NYC. Thurman visited Gandhi to learn about nonviolence as a strategy for social change. He was a spiritual mentor to Martin Luther King, Jr and other activists. He wrote *Jesus and the Disinherited*, one of the first modern texts to explore what Christianity means for those explicitly living under oppressive circumstances. We learned about Thurman's contemplative practices and listened to a meditation led by him. Rev. Pam also spoke about Barbara Holmes, a modern African American contemplative, and Holmes' reflection on lament as expressed by Jesus in the Garden at Gethsemane.

Rev. Robert spoke on the tradition of the "Spirituals." Spirituals were not only songs expressing the truths of the Faith, but songs of coded protest. At a time in which slaves could not be insubordinate, these songs expressed their longing to be free from oppression. The slaves saw themselves in the stories of liberation in the Bible. And as they sang about those who had been liberated before, the songs carried their own hopes of freedom, be it otherworldly or the hope of freedom in mortal life. Spirituals are extreme examples of what happens when theology meets oppressive circumstances. And even as they carry lament and give voice to sadness, they also encode hope and resistance and the promise of a God who hears, who cares, who loves, and who liberates.

Questions:

What was one thing that was meaningful to you about the session?

Were there reflections that came out of Thurman's meditation that were important to you?

(Some of the questions included "where is my treasure" and "to what am I true in life?")

Week 4 - The Absalom Jones Service and *Celebrating our Learning and our Connections*

Questions:

What was your experience of the worship service yesterday?

Are there parts of the sermon that drew your attention?

Is there something you have heard today that you are curious about?

Is there anything from this series that you would like to explore more deeply?

Concluding thoughts