

Readings for Spirituals Sunday...in honor of Black History Month and the inspiration of Black leaders who should not be forgotten.

Cara B. Hochhalter,  
with Don Freeman and Molly Scott.

Scriptures used: Amos 5:11-15, 22, 24 and Matthew 5:3-6, 10-12, 44-47.

**CARA** Let us listen now to the words of Langston Hughes, of Kate Stevens on her travels south, of Maya Angelou, of Martin Luther King Jr. and of Patrisse Khan-Cullors.

**CARA** James Mercer Langston Hughes (1902-1967) American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. Hear his words:

**DON** "This is *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*. One of my earliest poems written in 1920, just after I came out of highschool. The way this poem came to be written was, I was going to visit my father who lives in Mexico City and on the train going across the Mississippi River, just outside St. Louis, I looked out the window and saw this great muddy river flowing down toward the heart of the South and I began to think about what this river meant to the Negro people, how in a sense our history was linked to this river.

How in slavery times, my grandmother told me that to be sold down the Mississippi River was one of the worst things that could happen to a Negro slave. And then I remember that I read about Abraham Lincoln going down the Mississippi River as a young man. He went on a raft to New Orleans and he saw human beings being bought and sold in the slave market there and he was so horrified by this that he never forgot it.

Many years later we know that it was Lincoln who signed the Emancipation Proclamation. And so--- as the train went on into the gathering dusk, because it had been about sunset when we crossed the river, I took my father's letter out of my pocket and began to write this poem on the back of it."

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

*I've known rivers:*

*I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.*

*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

*I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.*

*I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.*

*I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.*

*I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln*

*went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

*I've known rivers:  
Ancient, dusky rivers.*

*My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

**CARA** These words are from Kate Stevens who is traveling in the South right now and sends us emails about her impressions of racial justice: Here is an excerpt from her latest epistle:

*In Charleston, South Carolina, John and I had a deep history day. We first took a tour of the Old Slave Mart Museum. For most of Charleston's history, slaves were just sold and auctioned out on the streets---at any particular street corner, but in 1856, it was thought better- for public appearance- to move the slave trading and slave auctions inside. So this slave market was open just from 1856 to 1863 and then the Emancipation Proclamation. This museum is the only slave auction site remaining---there used to be over 40 slave trading sites in a 4-block area! ...The museum showed the many ways slaves resisted; 50,000 or more enslaved Africans ran away each year in the south, prior to the Civil War....*

*John and I attended the Mother Emmanuel AME church in downtown Charleston. It is a predominantly black church with a lot of spirit. It is also the church where white nationalist Dylan Roof, in June of 2015, joined a Bible group for 45 minutes and then took out his gun and killed 9 worshippers, including the minister....Some of the survivors and family members made the news when they forgave the shooter at the trial.*

*At the church service last Sunday, there was a group of about 30 young high school juniors and seniors—all male and black—visiting that morning too. The minister called them down front at the end of the service to bless them. All the other young people in the congregation circled around down at the altar. Then the minister called for the 'prayer warriors' to come down and surround these young people. Mostly older black women joined at the front while the minister prayed....it was, as you might imagine, quite powerful.*

**MOLLY** A poem by Maya Angelou: 1928 -2014. She was an American poet, singer and civil rights activist.

### Caged Bird

A free bird leaps  
on the back of the wind  
and floats downstream  
till the current ends  
and dips his wing  
in the orange sun rays  
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks  
down his narrow cage  
can seldom see through  
his bars of rage  
his wings are clipped and  
his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill  
of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze  
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees  
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn  
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams  
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream  
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied  
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings  
with a fearful trill

of things unknown  
but longed for still  
and his tune is heard  
on the distant hill  
for the caged bird  
sings of freedom.

**CARA** Words from Martin Luther King Jr., (1929-1968) an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement from 1954 through 1968. He is best known as he advanced civil rights using nonviolence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs and inspired by the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi.

**DON** *"We need to recapture the gospel glow of the early Christians, who were nonconformists in the truest sense of the Word and refused to shape their witness according to the mundane patterns of the world. Willingly they sacrificed fame, fortune and life itself on behalf of a cause they knew to be right. Quantitatively small, they were qualitatively great."*

*"The greatest stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is...the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice..."*

*When Jesus says, "Love your enemies" he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition. Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies –or else? The chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation...But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter, I eventually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.*

*Was not Jesus an extremist for love; 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you...' Was not Amos an extremist for justice: 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'...Will we be extremists for hate or for love?"*

*This is our hope. This is the hope and conviction that all humankind of goodwill live by. It is at bottom the conviction that all reality hinges on moral foundations and that the whole cosmic universe has spiritual control...Let us not despair. Let us not lose faith in humankind and certainly not in God. We must believe that a prejudiced mind*

*can be changed, and that humankind, by the grace of God, can be lifted from the valley of hate---to the high mountain of love!"*

**CARA** **Words from Patrisse Khan-Cullors** a present-day artist, organizer, and freedom fighter from Los Angeles and Co-founder of Black Lives Matter, she is a Fulbright scholar and Sydney Australia Peace Prize awardee. These words are from her acceptance speech for this prize:

**MOLLY** *"In 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of Trayvon Martin, Alicia Garza wrote a love letter to Black people. It was powerful. It ended with the words, Black Lives Matter. When I saw that, I knew it had transformative power..."*

*This is why a movement like Black Lives Matter is happening now. One that looks at the necessity of intersectionality, the recognition of our struggles being interconnected, that our freedoms are intertwined, that this movement is global and has been global. It is the realization that we are all responsible. That there can be no neutrality.*

*We must organize and build in non-colonial ways and that means centralizing those who are most marginalized, building their capacity in self-determined ways, and putting them in positions of leadership. Our movement is built by all of us because all of our lives depend on it."*

**CARA** We are mostly a white congregation...but we are a congregation whose hearts are large. As we hear these words and sing these magnificent spirituals that help us feel the longing for justice in days gone by and in the days we live now...let us call on that inner voice of God to move us all, in the many ways that we know how, to join with our brothers and sisters of all races, religions and walks of life...to make peace in this world.

Now is the time....with the help of God, we shall overcome. Amen