

FIRST Unitarian Church , Hamilton

Sunday February 6, 2011

Black History Month Celebration

Guest Speaker: reverend George Horton

Theme: Racial Harmony; Reflections in Black and White

Scripture Texts: Genesis 6:9,10; 9:1; 10:20; Psalm 133; Song of Solomon chapter 1, verses 5 and 6.

*** INTRODUCTION: *****

This time last year we were celebrating a quantum leap in Race Relations. The unthinkable had happened. Martin Luther King's dream for America and the world was underway. The ark of the universe seemed indeed to be bending towards justice. But today we take pause to ask whether that dream is unfolding into a nightmare – the nightmare in Langston Hughes poem: **“What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun or fester like a sore? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load or does it explode?** The newly elected President, son of a Black man and a white woman from Kansas, who had gone to the best schools in America, lived in the world's poorest nations, married a Black American woman who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners and has within his family brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews of every race and every colour across three continents finds himself today stuck in a racial quagmire. Yet he is of the conviction and faith in God and the people and holds on to the dream that together we can move beyond some of the old racial wounds with no other choice than to pursue the road to a more perfect union. And I believe according to scripture that the God of the Bible can change our world from what it is to what it can become, if we will do our part. And the moral arc of the universe bends ever so slowly towards justice.

Our theme today in celebrating Black History Month is : Racial Harmony: Reflections in Black and White. First I would like to take you on a brief journey through Scripture for a look at God's plan for the human family. **In psalm 133 we are reminded of how good and pleasant it is for us to dwell together in unity.” Then I would like to share with you a brief personal episode in my own family.** During the reading of the scripture texts and in the children's quiz time we had a brief glimpse into the original black family and some highlights into a few who have been inducted into the Bible Hall of Fame.

In Genesis 6 reference is made to the family of Noah and the Black Nations . In passing It is interesting to note that segregationists often invoke the curse of Ham son of Noah as the reason for Blacks being condemned to the role of slavery. In another episode we read of **Nimrod, the son of Cush(the word for Blacks of that day).** He founded a civilization in Mesopotamia; and of **Abraham who came from the Chaldees, a land whose earliest inhabitants were Black.** In **Chronicles** Canaan is inhabited by Ham's offspring and In an earlier episode **Joseph marries a Black woman;** and there are hosts of other narratives of the **prominent roles of Blacks in the Bible; Melchizedek, king of Salem and**

Prophet of God; and Jethro Moses Father in Law; and Rahab, the prostitute who aided Joshua and the wilderness wanderers in their conquest of the Promised Land of Canaan, Canaan a wealthy African nation ; The Queen of Sheba, who was a ruler in her own rite and extolled for her wisdom and beauty by none other than Solomon, regarded as one of the most wise rulers in history. Another woman whose name is not revealed to us in The Song of Solomon speaks about her negritude with pride: “Don’t look upon me because I’m Black. I am Black but comely; Black as the tents of kedar. Look not upon me because I am Black because the sun has looked upon me. My mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but **my own** vineyards have I not kept.” (Song of Solomon 1:5,6.)

Baby Dee, a Rap Lyricist picks up on this theme as she sings, “Black but comely as a night shot with stars; Black but comely as the smoke of home.” Which brings me to my own narrative – a story told to me as a child of an Uncle, Uncle Cecil, who as a young man was called upon to make an extemporaneous speech to a mixed group of school mates. And the first words that came out of his mouth were a quote from this very text: “Don’t look upon me because I am Black. I am Black but comely”. When asked where it came from he replied: “I don’t know but I heard it from my mother. “ One of his classmates then asked him , “and what does “comely mean? He replied, “ I don’t know but I think it means “beautiful.**My Grandmother who related this story also tells of her own experience as a Black woman growing up in a multicultural society. Her** Grandfather was from West Africa. **Her father** Granpa Gittens had become a prominent taylor in a village near the Sugar Plantation. She would accompany her Father to the Plantation to deliver the clothes he had tailored for the Managers on the estate. **My Granfather’s father had come from England** as a Manager on the Plantation. **His son Was one of the Overseers on the Estate, a position only available to the white boys from England.** On that fateful day my Grandmother who fit the description of the woman in the Song of Solomon, “Black but comely” had a brief encounter with this White Boy and apparently there were several other such brief stealthy encounters. When the boy’s father realized what was happening he forbade his son from seeing my Grandmother. . My **Granfather** known for his stubbornness rebelled. **The outcome being that my Grandmother’s father was banished ,forbidden to darken the premises** .A nd so my Grandfather left to find a job as a Bookkeeper in Georgetown and married my Grandmother. **But he was instructed never again to darken the door of his parents home.** And so it came to pass that none of my grandparents offspring ever had the opportunity of getting to know the white side of our family tree. Whenever we sang the song in Sunday School, “whether yellow Black or white all are precious in his sight I always thought of God’s love for us all whether yellow , red, black or white and the example set by my **Grandparents and the call of God for unity in the human family.** * {show photograph of parent & grandparent. Note difference in skintones.

Grandfather whose picture is in family archives skintone is reflected in my mother while her other siblings are darker like our Grandmother.}*

Thank you for inviting me to another Black History celebration with you and your church. I congratulate you for your example and work in our community towards social justice and equality for all irrespective

of gender, race, class and ethnicity. I close with a poem from the work of Klyde Broox, my friend and local Bard who writes:

My best fiend is white and I am Black. I am black but my best friend is white. My best friend is white and I am black. But I am Black and racial realities bite when my best friend reacts typically white to my coloured insights – about matters of equal rights. I wonder is my best friend moe white than best friend? Less best friend than white? I don't know, maybe, maybe. I don't know if my best friend considers me more black than best friend – more black than friend, less friend than black? No stone unturned for honesty's sake; more lessons learned with each mistake. Good friends make bonds that will not break.. I know my friend is not a fake. My best friend is white and I am black so what! I am no less black because of that. I am black and my best friend is white. But that's all right! I am no less black because of that! In my best friend's face I see what I know to be features of one human race.

I REST MY CASE!

G.H.

For editing and printing!