



CONCORD SUNDAY SCHOOL

LESSON 37

SUNDAY,
SEPTEMBER 13,
2020

Exodus 15:20-21 NRSV

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. 21 And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Background

Exodus is the story of formerly enslaved people escaping to freedom. Or at least, that was their hope. As we learn, there was a good amount of wandering in the wilderness. In this passage, we see the People making sense of God's act to drown the soldiers. In the chapter before this one, the Lord shows Moses how to stretch his hand over the sea so that the water will overtake the Egyptians.

Read Exodus 14 in your own devotional period. How does this measure against continuous suggestions that oppressed people should “forgive but never forget?”

Today's lesson will focus on building collective visions of freedom.

Read the scripture out loud together.

Discuss with someone in your home. What is your reaction when someone who has hurt you experiences an inconvenience?

What's happening during this passage?

After Pharaoh's horses and chariots drowned, the Lord opened up the sea so that the Israelites could walk through safely. Miriam took her instrument and all the women followed behind her. Leading this impromptu chorus, Miriam sings, “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Why does this scene get a dedicated song of praise from Miriam?

This is a major scene in the book of Exodus. The people have been set free from generations of slavery and exploitation. They do not yet know where the Lord will take them, but they are absolutely certain that their old bullies are gone now. The text (especially in chapter 14) is intentional to name that the people saw the dead bodies of Egyptians on the seashore. Consider the joy that the munchkins had when Dorothy dropped her house on the Wicked Witch in *Wizard of Oz*. The people sang a song of celebration, singing, “she really is sincerely dead.” They even had someone to come and inspect the body to make sure that there was no threat of her coming back to wreak havoc on the people.

Why is Miriam called a prophet here?

Miriam does two important things. First, she assembles people to join her. And then she praises God for the things God has done.

Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney argues in *Womanist Midrash* that Miriam is the first woman identified as a prophet. Even more, she appears throughout the Old Testament even after she dies. Mary and Miriam are related names, and thus, “all of the Marys in the New Testament... are Miriams.” It is important to notice that the song Miriam invites people into is a call and response. She knows the people enough to lead them in the right song at the right moment. And as Dr. Gafney notes, “the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron but [there is no mention of] them grumbling against Miriam.”

Is this an appropriate response?

Consider the stress and trauma the people have been through. Genocide. Slavery. Exploitation. Hard hours. The heat of the sun. They’ve watched their families be separated and squashed. They haven’t been able to rest.

How would you react? The text tells us that the Israelites saw the bodies on the seashore. They likely saw uniforms, flags, lapel pins, colors that had previously been associated with danger. And now, they are no longer in that kind of danger. There may have been a wide range of reactions. Perhaps some people celebrated, some may have cried, some may have been in shock. The people, at least by this time, have no clue what is next. But they do know that at least the last people who hurt them are no longer an active threat. And this is a human response.

Why is Exodus so central to Black Christians?

Christian slave-owners manipulated the theological imagination of enslaved African people. The Slave Bible was a version of the Bible that intentionally excluded

Exodus along with other liberatory plots. The logic was, if these enslaved people could see that God had sided with oppressed people before, they might try to replicate those blueprints. Giving people the full story presents a threat to the economic and social structures in place. In 2018, it was on display at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. The original title of the bible was “Parts of the Holy Bible, selected for the use of the Negro Slaves, in the British West-India Islands,” published in 1807.

What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?

Connection to Today’s World



In 2018, Beyoncé performed at Coachella. Doing so made her the first Black woman to headline the concert. While many fans and bloggers focused on Beyoncé, something else was also happening. She sought out to design an HBCU themed performance, intentionally. This perform-

ance included songs for every generation and across the Diaspora. We took a trip to Brooklyn, West Africa, New Orleans, the Caribbean and even the Emerald City. Employing hundreds of Black artists and paying homage to a wide spectrum of Black music, the performance was highly regarded among fans and artists alike.

Praising their hard work, she said, “I wanted a black orchestra. I wanted the steppers. I needed the vocalists. I wanted different characters. I didn’t want us all doing the same thing...And the amount of swag is just limitless. Like, the things that these young people can do with their bodies and the music they can play, and the drum rolls, and the haircuts and the bodies and the ... it’s just not right!” She dreamed up a theme that would allow for different artists to showcase their unique talent.

Journal: What do you want to celebrate?

Closing: Sing/watch “How I Got Over,” by Mahalia Jackson.

For a video, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRVzOV5ZaLs>

How I got over? (How I got over)
How I made it over? (How I got over)
You know my soul look back and wonder
How I made it over? (Oh yes)

Prayer:

Dear God,

You are the God of Moses, Miriam and Aaron. You are the God of Nat, Harriet and Sojourner. You are the God of Fannie Lou Hamer and Dr. Gardner C. Taylor. You have been with our people over generations.

We come to you God as children who want to know the whole story. We know you have spent time with our ancestors. We invite your power and care as we head into a difficult season of turmoil.

Lord, give us the sense to seek the whole story and to vision freedom as you so desire.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

Works Cited:

<https://www.npr.org/2018/12/09/674995075/slave-bible-from-the-1800s-omitted-key-passages-that-could-incite-rebellion>

Womanist Midrash, Wil Gafney