

## **“We Are Not Alone”**

*Text Matthew 6: 22-30, preached at Bolton United Church by  
Reverend Eleanor Scarlett on February 2-2020.*

Isn't it ironic that the theme for today comes from our creed, "We are not alone, we live in God's world, we believe in God, who has created and is creating." The author of today's liturgy is confident that these words of faith stand to reassure us that God walks with us. This is a profound statement of faith not only for us, but for those who come after us.

As I was reflecting on the theme, I asked myself what these words would have meant for enslaved Africans in their quest for freedom. Just imagine a people fighting against all odds for freedom and knowing that they are not alone because God walks with them. James Cone an African American theologian reaffirms these words in the following statement, "As the slaves bent their backs day after day working against all odds the only thing that kept them going was their understanding of a Jesus who understood their struggles, because he had walked this road before". Africans of the Diaspora understand the meaning of these words. What about you?" What do these words mean for you as a congregation with almost 144 years of ministry and mission in this community? I wonder what was their understanding of Jesus? Next Sunday we will be gathering for our annual congregational meeting, and as we do, we will pause to reflect and remember those who have gathered in this place before us and for this, we give thanks. My question remains, what was their understanding of Jesus the Liberator?

As a member of the Black community of Canada I too pause to reflect upon the indelible legacy that has been handed down to me through the ages, even though these struggles continue today. How then do we as a people move through the phases of struggles in order to embrace the joys of knowing that Jesus the Liberator stands in solidarity with us? What then is Black history and why is it important for us to celebrate? In Canada the history of the Black people has not really made it into the pages of our history books, it is not something that is taught in schools.

So, by celebrating Black history during the month of February we are bringing to light, the stories, experiences, and accomplishments of peoples of African origin. Black history did not begin in recent times in Canada, but in ancient times in Africa. When Africans arrived here, they connected through their common African history and ancestry and have created Black

history here. The African Canadian population is made up of individuals from a range of places across the globe including the United States, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and Canada.

Rosemary Sadler former administrator of the Ontario Black history society states “in the past, African-Canadians were referred to by many different terms, some of which indicated their legal status. They may have been called Negroes, or coloured people. During enslavement, they may have been called slaves "having no ownership of oneself” or Creoles "having familiarity with more than one culture.”

Today, Black peoples of Canada primarily refer to themselves as Black which is a political or cultural concept, not just an adjective, or as African-Canadian among other possible terms including AfriCanadian and African-Nova Scotian or Jamaican-Canadian.

While Canadian author Lawrence Hill states that the story of blacks in Canada doesn't form part of the national narrative and is outside the mainstream of what most people learn. The author of the acclaimed historical novel “The Book of Negroes” told students at École Secondaries, in St. Léonard, Quebec that he noticed that most Canadians know more about the history of blacks in the United States than they do about the topic in their own country and province.

As a teenager, Hill said he was never taught about the history of blacks in Canada. If it wasn't for his parents, who had written books on the subject, “I wouldn't have even known that slavery existed in Canada.” The first recorded slave in Canada was Olivier Le Jeune who was brought from Africa as a child to Quebec in the 17th century. How many of you knew this? If you did not you are not alone.

Hill notes a few key milestones in Canadian Black history the abolishment of slavery in the British colonies that took effect in 1834 and the election in 1866 of Mifflin Gibbs to the Victoria Town Council, making him the first black politician in Canada. Fortunately for me I have had the privilege of knowing Mifflin Gibbs great granddaughter, through the Journeys of Black Peoples of The United Church.

As mentioned earlier Canadians know a lot about American black history but we don't know enough about our own black history,” so it is important

for us to make sure we talk about it. Let's get everyone aware, and let's talk about our history. It's important and we need to know about it.

How many of you were aware that the first big wave of Blacks came to Nova Scotia at the end of American Revolutionary War, and how, faced with racial discrimination, slavery and segregation in their new location, one-third of the Black loyalists ultimately left Halifax in 15 boats to create the colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone.

The first big exodus of Blacks from the Americas to return to live in Africa came from Halifax in 1792. Did you know that in 1796 approximately 600 Blacks arrived from Jamaica to settle in Nova Scotia. They were the Maroons. They came with skills that were used to build Citadel Hill and were solely responsible for building Government house. Most of the Maroons later left for Freetown, Sierra Leone, in West Africa, while the rest settled in East and North Preston and the Cherrybrook communities outside Dartmouth.

How many of you know the story of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a black slave who was accused in 1734 of setting fire to her master's house, which also destroyed half of what was then the city of Montreal. Unfortunately Angélique was convicted and executed. Even today the story is told that Angelique had nothing to do with the fire, that it was an accident. To this day most Quebecers have little to no concept that Enslavement of blacks existed in Montreal or Quebec City, even after the first slave in Canada was brought from Madagascar to Quebec.

As we reflect upon these stories, I would like for us to ask ourselves the following, what is the reading from Matthew's gospel calling us to be and do in our world today? The text begins by challenging us to see our eyes as a lamp. To see our eyes as God's light leading us from the world's darkness into God's amazing Light. There is an old saying that the eye is the soul to God.

Without the light we are unable to experience God's call that moves us from our places of comfort to experience the uncomfortable places of life. Unless we allow ourselves to move through these stages, we cannot experience transformation. Transformation is a process of change. We are reminded that no matter where we are, or what we have done God is with us and we are not alone.

The story of the Jamaican Maroons moving to Nova Scotia is a vivid reminder of persistence. These men and women fought against enslavement in search of their freedom. When they landed in Nova Scotia, they thought they had made it back to Africa. They fell on their knees and gave thanks to the Liberator for bringing them safely home.

God provides for the birds and the flowers of the field, that same God is ready and willing to lead you through the next phase of your journey. My prayers are that you take bold steps in knowing that the Liberator, who journeyed with your ancestors of the faith and delivered the Enslaved peoples from their struggles is with us. “We are not alone; we live in God’s world.” God is with us. And the people of God say Amen!