



MEN'S DAY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Sunday, July 27, 2008

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I. Themes in Men's Day Services

The verses of this cultural moment's scripture express themes that are celebrated annually in African American Men's Day services. The first theme is the necessity for African American men to trust in God's power when they engage in any battle. African American males, like the members of the church at Ephesus, are reminded annually in sermons and myriad rituals to "put on the whole armor of God." The second theme is a call for unity, a popular African American folk theme. It is sounded again and again in annual African American Men's Day services. The Apostle Paul reminds the men of the church at Ephesus of both the collective nature, and enormity of their struggle: "For **we** wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Men's Day speakers, clerical and lay alike, remind congregations of both the untapped power of African American male unity and the daunting task of overcoming the crippling effects of American racism and other inequities that men and their families must face.

II. A Famous Call to Men

In the winter of 1994, Minister Louis Farrakhan issued an ecumenical call to all African American males to affirm the formerly stated Men's Day themes. He did so through an essay entitled "One Million Man March." In the December 14, 1994 issue of The Final Call, Farrakhan began his historic address to African American males, thusly:

For 440 years the Black male has been the object of scorn, ridicule, and abuse, worse than that suffered by any people in the annals of history. The Black male is so destroyed, that Allah [God] Himself has to do today what He did in the beginning, and that is to declare His involvement in the process of the remaking of man.

We, as students and followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, are calling on all able-bodied Black men to set aside a day, October 16, 1995, for an historic March on Washington to declare to the Government of America and the world, that we are ready to take our place at the head of our families and our communities and that we, as Black men, are ready to shoulder the responsibility of being the maintainers of our women and children and the builders of our communities. There is enough unused and underdeveloped talent in the Black male to build an entirely New World...

Farrakhan concluded his essay with this call for unity:

Black men from every religious affiliation, every civic, fraternal or political persuasion, from the revolutionist to the integrationist, from the Christians, to the Muslims, Hebrews and Agnostics – all of us will be together. There will be a common denominator uniting the fractions and the factions. On that one day we will see the value socially of never allowing artificial barriers to impede the advancement of our people.¹

III. Prose Excerpts

The African American male is a recurring character in Ernest J. Gaines' novel, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. In this novel, themes of steadfastness and determination are raised as they are in our lection scripture. In Gaines' novel, Miss Jane recalled how Ned, the school teacher, shared his vision of the importance of building a school with her and other recently emancipated slaves: "I'm telling you all this because I want my children to be men,' Ned told us. 'I want my children to fight. Fight for all – not just for a corner. The black man or white man who tell you to stay in a corner want to keep your mind in a corner too. I'm building that school so you'll have a chance to get from out of that corner.'"²

Finally, improving the health of African American males has become an emerging theme in African American Men's Day services. In the 21st century, staying healthy has become a message that is continually preached to men. It has become another way of telling Christian men that being healthy is a part of putting on the armor of God, for our bodies are the temple of God. Perhaps the most striking bearer of this new message was the Reverend Charles R. Williams, the deceased founder, CEO and President of Indiana Black Expo, who sought to teach his fellow African American males about the health risks of prostate cancer among African American males before he died. In his book, That Black Men Might Live: My Fight

Against Prostate Cancer, Reverend Williams concludes his “Acknowledgements” section with this moving testimonial of faith:

But most importantly, to God Almighty, the one who created me, the one who will deliver me from the clutches of this dreadful disease. Thanks to the gentle urging of the spirit, I now no longer feel that I am a victim; I know that I have been chosen. Chosen by God to go forth in the world among men and be the bearer of news that can sustain lives. I thank him every day for the privilege and for His blessings...³

IV. Traditional Songs for Men’s Day

Two Negro Spirituals, and one recent song capture the themes and mood of Men’s Day as it has long been celebrated by African American churches. First, the unyielding faith in the power of God is imbued in this spiritual:

Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel?

(Chorus)

Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel?
Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel?
And why not every man?

He delivered Daniel from the lion’s den
And Jonah from the belly of the whale
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace
Why not every man?

(Chorus)

The moon runs down in a purple stream
And the sun refused to shine
And every star did disappear
Yes, freedom shall be mine.

(Chorus).⁴

By the same token, the prophetic anger vented in the introduction of Louis Farrakhan’s call for a Million Man March is expressed in the lyrics of this Negro Spiritual:

If I Had My Way

If I had my way
If I had my way in this wicked world
I would tear
Oh, yes, I’d tear this building down

If I had my way
If I had my way in this wicked world
I would tear
Ooo-oooh, I’d tear this building down

King came up from Egypt
Spreading war all around
Walls of the city crumble
The temple crashed to the ground

All but a-one man standing a high on a cliff
With a rock in his hand
Lord, oh Lord, give me the power
To free this land

If I had my way
If I had my way in this wicked world
I would tear
Ooo-oooh, I'd tear this building down

So come on and deliver me
Oh, from these chains, you know
Because a-I know it's wrong
Oh, but I don't know what to do or say

If I had my way
If I had my way in this wicked world
I would tear
Ooo-oooh, I'd tear this building down.⁵

The final and most recently written song calls for African American men to put on the armor of God and stand against powers seen and unseen because God will enable us to overcome.

Stand

What do you do
when you've done all you can
And it seems like it's never enough?
And what do you say
when your friends turn away,
you're all alone?
Tell me, what do you give
When you've given your all,
and seems like
you can't make it through?

Stand and be sure
Be not entangled in that bondage again
You just stand, and be sure.
God has a purpose.
Yes, God has a plan.

Tell me what do you do
when you've done all you can

And it seems like you can't make it through
Child you just stand
You just stand
Stand
Don't you give up
Through the storm, through the rain
Through the hurt, through the pain

[Chorus]

Well, you just stand
When there's nothing left to do
You just stand
Watch the Lord see you through
Yes, after you've done all you can
You just stand

Don't you bow, don't bend
Don't give up, don't give in
Hold on, just be strong
God will step in and it won't be long

Tell me,
how do you handle the guilt of your past?
Tell me, how do you deal with the shame?
And how can you smile
when your heart is broken
and filled with pain?
Tell me what do you give
when you've given your all
Seems like you can't make it through?

After you've done all you can
After you've gone through the hurt
After you've gone through the pain
After you've gone through the storm
After you've gone through the rain
Prayed and cried, you've prayed and cried
Prayed and cried, prayed and cried
After you've done all you can, you just stand.

Child, you just stand,
when there's nothing left to do
You just stand
Watch the Lord see you through
Yes, after you've done all you can
You just stand.⁶

V. Possible Program Illustrations

Million Man March poster
The image used for this lectionary unit

Notes

1. Farrakhan, Louis. "One Million Man March." 14 Dec. 1994. Transcript online location: <http://africawithin.com/mmm/mmmcall.htm> accessed 30 April 2008; Original publication: Farrakhan, Louis. "One Million Man March." *The Final Call*. 14 Dec. 1994.
2. Gaines, Ernest J. The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1971. p. 115.
3. Williams, Charles R., and Vernon A. Williams. That Black Men Might Live: My Fight against Prostate Cancer. Roscoe, IL: Hilton Pub. Co, 2003. p. xiii.
4. Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? Lyrics online location: www.ActionNext.com. accessed 30 April 2008; Enter title in search box.
5. Clover. "If I Had My Way." Fourty-Niner. Berkeley, CA: Fantasy, 1970; see Clover website for information on Fourty-Niner album online location: www.clover-infopage.com. accessed 30 April 2008
6. McClurkin, Donnie. "Stand." Donnie McClurkin. Burbank, CA: Warner Alliance, 1996.