

On the mind of the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Jung-Chul Lee

This weekend we celebrate the Feast of Absalom Jones, on the anniversary of his death, which was on February 13, 1818. Absalom Jones is remembered because he founded the first black Episcopal congregation in 1794, and in 1802, was the first African-American to be ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church. Born a slave, Jones purchased his wife's freedom in 1778, before being manumitted himself in 1784. He spent much of his life and ministry as an abolitionist, and was instrumental in helping to create laws that would prevent free blacks and freed black slaves from being captured and taken (back) into slavery—a practice of (re)enslavement that was often supported by the legal structures (e.g. police, local courts, etc.) of his day.

I've celebrated this feast ten times as an Episcopal priest, but as I celebrate it again this year, I'm thinking especially about "time." If you stop and pay attention to the dates I just mentioned, there's a lot there. Jones spent six additional years in slavery, after freeing his wife, before he himself was free and they could be together. *Six years*. Where were you six years ago? Where might you be six years from now? It was also eight years after he founded the first black Episcopal congregation that he was officially recognized by the church as its leader. Ever worked at a job where you weren't given the recognition (promotion, etc.) you deserved? Ever had to stick with it for eight years before you did?

I imagine that, in both of those lengthy seasons of dissonance, there were moments that required great patience, courage, wisdom, resilience, and perseverance. Jones also died more than fifty years before his work as an abolitionist would culminate in emancipation; more than a hundred and fifty years before the Civil Rights Acts; and over two hundred years before the recent efforts at criminal justice reform. That's a really long time. And especially in light of that lengthy time, I'm thinking about two things this year.

First, justice takes a long time—so don't give up hope. As Martin King once said, "though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice." There are injustices in the world that we may spend our whole lives fighting. And we may never ourselves see that justice executed. Absalom Jones sure didn't. But—and this is the hope—that doesn't mean that justice isn't still on its way. The work that Absalom Jones did didn't come to fruition in his lifetime. Nevertheless, that work was not done in vain.

Second, justice takes a long time—so don't take it for granted. The path from justice to injustice is not straight, is often hard won, and is constantly being renegotiated. Think for a second about the fact that the first black Episcopal congregation was founded, and the first black Episcopal priest ordained, over two hundred years ago. Now think about that in light of the hard—but incontrovertible—reality that the Episcopal Church today is among the most racially white denominations in the world. As an Asian-American, I'm actually part of a "null set"—meaning, there are so few Asian-Americans in the Episcopal Church, we actually don't register as a statistic in the data.

In the time since Absalom Jones, there have been times when it's been both better and worse to be a person of color in our church than it is today. And that should remind us that justice isn't an achievement you secure, so that you can then sit back rest on your laurels. It is a living reality that needs to be constantly nourished, supported, maintained, and grown. And so I think here of the words of St. Paul: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is good...." (Gal. 6.9). Happy Feast of Absalom Jones, dear church. May we be this kind of hoping and helping people, until we are living in the reality that Absalom Jones worked so hard to attain.

20s/30s OUTING – February 25

The 20s/30s Group will meet at the Morgan Library & Museum (225 Madison at 36th) for "Free Friday" on **Friday, February 25, at 6:00 p.m.** Then we'll head out for drinks and discussion about the Morgan exhibit on Gwendolyn Brooks, who was the first Black author to win a Pulitzer Prize in any category.

RSVPs are required. Contact the Rev. Dr. Nate Lee at nlee@churchoftheincarnation.org to reserve your spot and/or to be added to our 20s/30s email distribution list.

“LUNDI GRAS” AT MORAVIAN OPEN DOOR – February 28

The Moravian Open Door Committee is organizing a Mardi Gras bingo party to be held at Moravian Open Door (347 E. 18th St.), a transitional housing facility for homeless adults. The party will be from **6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Monday, February 28** – hence, Lundi Gras!

We are seeking donations of \$10 gift cards to serve as bingo prizes, as well as refreshments (individually wrapped, please). Contact the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser at adannhauser@churchoftheincarnation.org to RSVP for the party and/or to make a donation for this event. Suggested gift cards include CVS, Starbucks, Chipotle, Subway, Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.

ASH WEDNESDAY – March 2

Begin your observance of a Holy Lent with the Imposition of Ashes and Holy Communion. We offer services on Ash Wednesday at 8:15 a.m., 12:15 p.m. and 6:15 p.m. The 12:15 p.m. service includes organ music with soloists from the Incarnation Choir and will be livestreamed on our YouTube channel.

Ash Wednesday also marks the beginning of our annual Confirmation and Inquirers' Class. If you are interested in becoming a member of Incarnation or would simply like to explore the basics of the Christian faith as experienced in the Episcopal tradition, you are encouraged to attend. **The class will be held on five consecutive Wednesdays from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the Parish Dining Room. Participants can also join by Zoom.**

Everyone should discover something of interest, find their faith enriched, and make deeper relationships within the parish. We will cover the fundamental doctrines of our faith, church history, reading the Bible, and more.

Confirmations will occur at the 11:00 a.m. service on Sunday, April 3, when the Rt. Rev. Catherine Roskam, retired Suffragan Bishop of New York, will be with us to preach and celebrate the Eucharist. Contact the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser at adannhauser@churchoftheincarnation.org for more information or to enroll in the class.

EVERY WEEK AT INCARNATION

Sunday Bible Study: Bible Study is held in the Parish House on Sundays from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m. (Masks are required.) We generally follow the Yale Bible Study program, which offers course materials on select books of the Bible, deepened by insights from Yale Divinity School professors.

Sunday School for Children: During the 11:00 a.m. service, children ages 3 to 10 depart the service with their teachers for Sunday School in the Parish House. (Masks are required, and all teachers have been vaccinated.) They return before the end of worship. See our website, churchoftheincarnation.org, for more information on Children and Family Ministries.

Wednesday Holy Eucharist: Join us each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. for this Rite I spoken service of Holy Eucharist, which includes a brief homily and organ music.

Thursday Candlelight Communion: Join us each Thursday at 6:15 p.m. for Candlelight Communion, a service of Holy Eucharist that incorporates chant and silence as well as elements of contemporary worship. This service is informal and contemplative, with music led by a Cantor and a brief reflection by one of the clergy. You can also stream this service on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/churchoftheincarnation.

Daily Office: Services of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer and Compline are held via Zoom. To receive Zoom access information and view the weekly schedule, join our email distribution list by filling out the yellow Connect Card found in your pew or signing up through our website.