Juneteenth

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**Psalm 22:19-28**

19But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

20Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

21Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

22I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

24For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

25From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

26The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!

27All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

28For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Tomorrow is Juneteenth. I didn’t know about Juneteenth until a few years ago, so I’m curious, for how many of you, is Juneteenth a new holiday?

Growing up white, here in Oregon, I never heard of Juneteenth until a few years ago and then I had to look it up to figure out what exactly it is.

**Juneteenth**

**June 19, 1865 Freedom for All Enslaved People**

**January 1, 1863 Emancipation Proclamation)**

Juneteenth gets its name from June 19th, 1865, when Union Army General Gordon Granger announced General Order No. 3, proclaiming freedom for enslaved people in Texas, which was the last state in the Confederacy to give up slavery -- 2 ½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation was made January 1, 1863.

Juneteenth is the celebration of when the last enslaved peoples in the United States were finally free.

Juneteenth became an official Federal holiday just last year, but it has been celebrated since 1866 with Church picnics, family BBQ’s, readings of the Emancipation Proclamation, street fairs, Miss Juneteenth pageants, and singing songs like Lift Every Voice and Sing.

Celebrated since 1866 and I had never heard of it until a couple of years ago! And it wasn’t a Federal Holiday until 2021.

Why?

Why wasn’t I taught about Juneteenth in school?

I was taught about the Civil War and Reconstruction, but not Juneteenth.

Why?

Here’s a related question. Have you heard of the Slave Bible? The Slave Bible was created by slave owners. The Slave Bible is a version of the Bible that was edited to only include scripture that was deemed appropriate for enslaved people by their enslavers.

Did you know that in the Slave Bible had the Psalms edited out?

There were no Psalms in the Slave Bible.

Why?

Let’s look at our reading for today from Psalm 22.

**Psalm 22:19-28**

You can look it up in your Pew Bible if that helps - Psalms are near the middle.

This time, listen for words or phrases that slave owners would not want the people they are enslaving to read.

What words or phrases stood out for you as things slave owners wouldn’t want the people they are enslaving to read?

I think that I didn’t learn about Juneteenth until recently for the same reason that the Psalms were removed from the Slave Bible.

Because racism isn’t just an attitude that some people have, it’s a system - an economic system, a legal system, a social system, that we are all caught up in.

I don’t want to be racist.  
I think this is true for the vast majority of white people - we don’t want to be racist - that is, we don’t want anybody to be discriminated against.

I think everyone - Black, White, LGBTQ+, Hispanic, Asian, Disabled, immigrant, young, old, and just everyone, want the same things.

We all want to be safe. Safe from violence, safe from persecution, safe in our homes, safe to go to the grocery store, or go for a jog without someone attacking us. For our kids to be safe in our schools. And to have laws enforced fairly for all people.

We all want economic security. Everyone wants to be able to make a living wage, to be able to afford housing, transportation, and food.

We all want to be treated with respect. Common courtesy. Basic dignity. With grace and acceptance for all our little differences.

We all want the same things.

We are all beloved children of God.

So if we all want these things for ourselves and for one another, what is it in this world that seeks to silence the songs of liberation?

What is it in this world that does not want us to “lift every voice and sing?”

That does not want us to proclaim that,

26The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord.

I’m not a big fan of a theology that personifies evil, or claims that “the devil made me do it,” because I’m a Methodist, and we believe in free will and the power of Sanctifying Grace to help us do better.

But I do believe in the existence of evil, and I perceive evil in these systems of injustice that seem to take on a life of their own despite the fact that we all say that we do not want to be a part of them.

And if evil is so determined that we should not sing.

That we should not celebrate.

That we should not cry out to God for deliverance from the swords of war and the dogs of oppression.

That we should not expect God’s deliverance or celebrate in anticipatory hope of what impossible thing God will do next.

The very fact that evil wants us to be discouraged, tells me that we should sing!

We should cry out for deliverance and accept God’s invitation to be a part of that deliverance.

We very much should celebrate every victory, large and small.

We should rejoice in the defeat of evil every time we learn a little bit more - how to do less harm and more good.

Celebrate that now that we know better we can do better.

Celebrate that I am learning to be anti-racist instead of complaining about how hard it is to change the habits I grew up with.

Celebrate every time we discover another way to do all the good we can!

So today, let’s celebrate Juneteenth as we celebrate Pride Month. After all, Pride was started by Marsha P. Johnson, a beautiful Black, Trans woman.

Let’s let our shared joy fuel our shared fight to fulfill our baptismal vows, to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.