

BLACK HISTORY MONTH EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF HUMANITY

February has been designated as Black History month. The media has freshened our memory of the heart-breaking struggles of Black Americans to rise from slavery and servitude to their rightful freedom. Many barriers have been broken down and new bridges built. However much work remains to be done.

Several years ago the television screenplay, *Roots*, caused us to vicariously experience the intimate struggles of those who were born into slavery. Viewers were forced to consider such haunting questions as: “What if that black man or that black woman was my mother and father? What if I was that innocent baby opening my eyes to behold black parents who were slaves?”

Obviously, you and I had no choice about being conceived; or who our mother and father were; or what their place in society; or whether they were qualified to be worthy parents.

We also recognize that our roots entwine themselves in mysterious ways back to our famous parents whom God named Adam, and Eve. Therefore we recognize that in some way our roots depend on nourishment found only in the common soil of humanity.

Sunday evening, February 24, 2008, a large group gathered to celebrate Black History. I was asked to bring a meditation before we participated in the Communion service. To introduce the Communion service I read 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26 from The Message Translation: “The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, he broke it and said; this is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. After supper he did the same thing with the cup; this cup is my blood, my new covenant with you. Each time you drink this cup, remember me.”

This passage brings us to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. If there is anything in the world that equalizes human beings, it is the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross destroys the barriers of distinction that separates humans by race, creed, color or social standings. The ground beneath the cross is perfectly level.

There is no such thing as an upper, middle or lower class. No good better or best. There is no superior anything. No superior class, race, education, cultural, lingual or social distinction. Every man woman and child stands unclothed before God.

Following the worship service my wife and I joined Mrs. Florence Harper in a thought provoking conversation. She told us of her family history that is preserved at the Atchison Library.

When Mrs. Harper told us that her great grandfather was a slave, I felt a strange emotional kinship with her. I sat beside her and asked for more information. We didn’t have time to go into great detail but I tried to become aware of some of her emotional involvement with her struggle to find peace and freedom in a society that had denied that peace and freedom to her family.

I felt a strange bonding with Mrs. Harper. The bonding came not because my great grandfather was a slave—but because my grandfather was enslaved by race prejudice. My grandfather would likely have hated her grandfather. My grandfather embarrassed, sickened, and frightened me with stories about his youthful attitudes and activities.

Now, I must face my responsibility as a Christian. If I am truly free, I cannot enslave anyone!

Micah 6:8 gives us guidelines. “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doeth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”