



Words of Welcome and Purpose

Reunion Service Historic St. George's and Mother Bethel

Delivered by the Rev. Alfred T. Day III, Host Pastor

October 25, 2009

Welcome to worship today.... We're here today because God's Spirit is full of surprises. In this case, the surprise began stirring in an invitation to Mother Bethel's pastor to come to St. George's for a preaching visit during this our 240th anniversary year. The Holy Spirit, always excited by the "what if..." grabbed hold of Dr. Tyler who answered, "Sure, I'll come and preach. But what if I bring Mother Bethel with me that day?"

Indeed. A few months later, both of us trying to be vigilant in organizing such a momentous day while trying not getting in the Spirit's way, well, here we are.

Welcome to you Mother Bethel AME Church. You bless in ways mere words fall short in expressing: the inconveniences you've endured in moving your services here, the good will you extend with your presence, even the risk you take in coming thru our doors, climbing all these steps and gracing us when the

memory of what happened in this very space 200 and some years ago – the hurt, hostility disgrace and disappointment experienced by your ancestors is part of history that might keep folk away from here – especially for a church service. But by the amazing grace of God and the serendipity of the Holy Spirit, history is less a closed book than an open one.

Welcome to you Dr. Tyler.
Welcome Rev. Cross.
Welcome Mother Bethel staff and work team who with St. George's folk came together to make today happen.
Welcome visitors and guests from other churches.
Welcome denominational leaders from the AME, UMC, and other reps from the alphabet soup of churches and organizations who wanted to be here for this marvelous, historic service.

Why do we do what we do today? Why do we keep coming back to something that happened so long ago? That was then and this is now and all that.

Historic churches like ours must be careful not to give into the temptation to be shrines to the past – the good ol' days or the bad ol' days – whatever the case may be – without remembering where, when and how, through all the proverbial dangers, toils and snares, the God who makes a way out of no way, who brings new life out of death and transformation from challenge and difficulty – the God of our mothers and fathers is busy pointing to the Promised Land more than back to Egypt.

Why do we do what we do today? Why do we keep coming back to something that happened so long ago? Because in church and community there are still people pushed into balconies or as far to the edges as we can push them, because in church and community we are still judging people by metrics other than the content of their character, because in church and community we hear about judges denying marriage licenses to interracial couples,

because of segregated swimming pools not all that far from here, because people profiled so that they can't be at home in their own house if it look like they don't belong in the neighborhood. Because we must never forget—God's people of St. George's and Mother Bethel – the story our ancestors have lived, hope can rise from it amidst the hurt. The work overcoming racism, discrimination and division is work that every generation must do in and for its own time.

So today, Mother Bethel, you grace us in coming here because what stands as a historic symbol of discrimination, fear and hostility can also stand for a new day and time, can also become a symbol of a new time and new day in a nation and a world still struggling with racial division.

Let today be the beginning of a new witness. Not forgetting the past, but looking that past squarely in the eye, joining hands for the rest of the journey to God's Promised Land. And let the Lord's Table we share today be the first of many places where together we find sustenance to continue the tricky trek that racial conversation and combating racism always is.

Mark, Dr. Tyler, as a token of our welcome to you and Mother Bethel, the Trustees, Church Council and members have this cross for you. It is made from the nails that built the balcony our ancestors used to segregate black and white. May God use the very thing that built barriers that divided us and caused bad memories to be an instrument that remembers and rejoices in our coming together today. And going forward from here.

Welcome, welcome, welcome! The Holy Spirit bless your message to us today.

