

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church  
Bible Study  
Monday, February 2, 2009

Jeremiah 39:15-18

It is unusual for blacks in the Bible to be highlighted. Even today most people are surprised to know that there are blacks in the Bible. There has been a deliberate attempt to portray the people in the Bible as being white Europeans. But this is inaccurate and biblically unsound. There are also blacks for whom it is unimportant that there are blacks in the Bible. For them all that is important is the Bible story. The fallacy of their thinking is that they cannot understand or appreciate the Bible without knowing who is in the Bible. For years and years the society that surrounds us has succeeded in hiding the black African identities of these biblical people as part of its program to instill within us a sense of rootlessness, worthlessness and nobodiness. But it helps us in our faith walk to know that we are in “the book” and that God used us to play a role in His plan for the world.

Tonight we want to take a look at a man named Ebed-melech. He is one of those biblical personalities we do not hear too much about, yet he had a significant role to play in the unfolding of God’s will. He was a Ethiopian who lived in Jerusalem during the time of Jeremiah the prophet (627-580 B.C.E.)

What makes Ebed-melech important in the first place is that he was available to God. When Jerusalem came under the threat of destruction from Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem looked for a way out. But the way he wanted out was not God’s way. Zedekiah’s way was to make an alliance with the Egyptians believing that their combined military alliance would be able to defeat Babylon. But God’s way was for Jerusalem to forget about an alliance with Egypt, surrender to Babylon, and repent of the sins that got them into trouble in the first place. Isn’t it interesting that whether it is individuals or nations few of us want to make repentance a part of our plan? We want God to deliver and bless us without our repentance. So God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people that disaster was coming if they did not do as God had directed and surrender to the Babylonians. (Jeremiah 37:11-21; 38:1-3) This enraged the king’s generals and counselors, so they seized Jeremiah and threw him into a muddy well to starve to death. (Jeremiah 38:4-6) God, however was watching over Jeremiah and He had someone go to the king and report what the king’s men had done. As a result God made the king give permission to that same someone to go to get help and retrieve Jeremiah from the well. That same someone succeeded in pulling Jeremiah from the well. He not only pulled Jeremiah from the well he also delivered him to safety. That someone was Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian. When God needed someone to rescue God’s servant, Ebed-melech was available to be used.

Why is the example of Ebed-melech so important? It is because this is really all God ask of us. Not that we be strong and powerful first, not that we be well established and well organized first, but that we be available to God. Some of us are strong and powerful but we don’t make ourselves available to God. Others of us are well established and

organized but again we don't make ourselves available. But God insist that we make ourselves available to Him first. If we make ourselves available to God first, then God will give us the strength and power that we need, and establish and organize us for action. But first we must make ourselves available.

Making ourselves available is our decision and responsibility. This was Ebed-melech's decision and this is our decision. Our history is full of Ebed-melech's, people who made themselves available first. Richard Allen, founder of A.M.E. Church, Harriett Tubman, founder of Underground Railroad, Rosa Parks, Montgomery Bus Boycott, Martin Luther King, Civil Rights Movement, etc..... Each of us should ask ourselves, are we willing to make ourselves available to God, are we willing to let God use us in His service?

Ebed-melech was also notable because he was willing to put his neck on the line. Even though he had the king's permission to rescue Jeremiah, his life would have been forfeited if the king's generals and counselor's had found out about his plan. Ebed-melech trusted God and was willing to put his life on the line for what God wanted. He teaches us an important lesson; we cannot do God's will without taking risk. There is no such thing as "playing it safe" and doing what God wants us to do.

Ebed-melech also stands out because he was willing to help his "brother." Jeremiah was a Jew, Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian, but they were brothers in the Lord. Ebed-melech knew he had to act when his "brother" was in trouble. When Jerusalem was finally destroyed because of their disobedience, God rewarded Ebed-melech by keeping him safe, simply because he trusted in God enough to help his brother Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 39"15-18)

Let us learn from the example of Ebed-melech and make ourselves available for service, lending somebody a helping hand. There are still Jeremiah's in the well today and we need to get them out. The wells are everywhere. Youth trapped in the well of broken and dysfunctional homes. Men and women, children and families caught in the well of no healthcare. More and more people in the well of unemployment. There are a lot of people trapped in wells. Will you make yourself available to help them?