



# **From Chains to Freedom: Journeying Toward Reconciliation**

**2007 Racial Justice Resource**

**Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network**

**Welcome** to this 2007 Racial Justice Resource kit. *From Chains to Freedom: Journeying Towards Reconciliation* is designed to serve as a resource for your congregation's worship, learning and reflection throughout the year. The lectionary texts featured in the sermon notes are for the week that includes March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and March 25, the day the Slave Trade Abolition bill passed through Parliament in the UK in 1807 200 years ago.

You will find that this year's resource contains a wealth of documentation for reflection on two stages: from chains to freedom, and journeying towards reconciliation. The slave trade may have been abolished 200 years ago, but unfortunately many of the effects of the slave trade remain with us, and perhaps we have only begun the journey toward reconciliation. Slavery itself persists to this day in many different forms.

Beside the resources included in this kit, we would like to suggest two additional sources. Churches Together in England has been an important source and inspiration for us in our work. Visit their site, [www.setallfree.net](http://www.setallfree.net) for additional resources on commemorating this 200th anniversary, and action ideas for how to contribute to current anti-slavery campaigns. The story of Black churches in Canada and their own links to slavery and flight from slavery is not well known. The video Seeking Salvation is an outstanding documentary celebrating the Black church and its deep history in Canada. Order your copy at <http://www.seekingsalvation.ca> to show at your next church gathering.

We remain committed to learning and hearing from you about what you found most useful in this resource, and what we might improve. We offer these articles in the hope that they will generate discussion and reflection. Please complete the evaluation form on the following page and send it in right away, so that we have feedback and suggestions to make good decisions regarding upcoming resources.

The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network is especially grateful to Dr. Hazel Campayne and Steve Kabetu who have served as co-chairs for this year's resource. They have contributed countless hours of volunteer time that have made this resource possible. They used all their networks to attract an excellent roster of authors. We are grateful to all for their written contributions: Adele Halliday, Afua Cooper, Rosemary Sadlier, Robert Moore, Everton Gordon, Ivan MacFarlane, Hazel Campayne, Norah McMurtry, and Jeanette Romkema. Bushra Junaid very kindly helped with artwork and Anne O'Brien helped pull it all together with her excellent editing skills.

In the hope that these resources might help you and your congregation to delve deeper into the legacy of the slave trade and its abolition, we remain committed to facilitating a learning and action process that might bring us further down the path toward racial reconciliation. Join with us. Contact the Steering Committee through one of the co-chairs to offer your feedback and suggestions. Consider volunteering your time, energy and resources to help create next year's resource.

***The members of the Steering Committee are:***

Esther Wesley (co-chair) The Anglican Church of Canada [ewesley@national.anglican.ca](mailto:ewesley@national.anglican.ca)

Jose Zarate The Anglican Church of Canada (PWRDF)

Ani Shalvardjian The Armenian Holy Apostolic Church

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Norah McMurtry (co-chair) Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada [mcmurtry@wicc.org](mailto:mcmurtry@wicc.org)

## **The Canadian Council of Churches**

The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) is the largest ecumenical body in Canada, now representing 21 churches of Anglican, Evangelical, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. The CCC is one of the few ecumenical bodies in the world that includes such a range of Christian churches. The officers and staff of the Council are drawn from the whole diversity of traditions represented by the member churches.

## **The Commission on Justice and Peace**

The Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches provides a forum for sharing information and concerns among those involved in ecumenical work on peace and social justice in Canada and the world; reflecting biblically and theologically on peace and social justice; and facilitating the cooperation of the churches in peace and justice concerns. One program area of the Commission on Justice and Peace is “Undoing Racism in Canadian Churches.”

## **The Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network (CEARN)**

This network is an expression of Canadian churches working together to support anti-racism programs and educators who are working in member churches, sharing resources and learning among anti-racism educators, and supporting long-term change in Canadian churches and church organizations.

The CEARN Steering Committee is made up of representatives from various Christian denominations, and also benefits from the active participation and leadership of staff from sister ecumenical organizations, the Women’s Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC) and KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives.

## **Artist’s Statement**

Born in Montreal and raised in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Bushra Junaid is a Toronto-based artist and illustrator of African and Caribbean parentage whose work is largely concerned with issues of identity and representation. Junaid credits African-American artist Romare Bearden’s piece *Roots Odyssey* (c. 1976) for inspiring this cover.

“Reconciliation begins with acknowledgement; acknowledgement of the horror that was slavery and of its continued impact on the descendants of slaves and on those whose ancestors or societies profited from the slave trade. We may not be responsible for what our ancestors did or for the role they played in history but we should acknowledge how history has influenced where we are today and how it impacts both positively and negatively on others. Without acknowledgement and an effort to redress past and present wrongs none of us will truly be free.”

Pope John Paul II addresses issues of slavery  
In Jamaica (1993)

**John Paul II called on all humanity, “To seek pardon for the tragic enslavement of African men, women and children uprooted from their homes and separated from loved ones, to be sold as merchandise. Let the wound of the past be healed.”**

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# FEEDBACK FORM

This Racial Justice Week Resource is a project of the Canadian churches. Members of the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Networks prepared this material for congregations to use in worship services and study groups.

We need your feedback to help us decide whether this is a good project to promote each year and what kind of resources would be most helpful to congregations in their learning journeys. Please take the time to fill out this form. If you have more to say, please add it to the back of the sheet and send it to:

Racial Justice Resource Feedback  
c/o Canadian Council of Churches,  
47 Queen's Park Crescent East,  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C3  
Fax: 416-927-0405  
Or e-mail [noteboom@ccc-cce.ca](mailto:noteboom@ccc-cce.ca).

1. Please indicate which part of the resource you found most useful

- Articles *Comments:*
- 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade *Comments:*
- Sermon notes *Comments:*
- Worship resources *Comments:*
- Song suggestions *Comments:*
- Resource List *Comments:*

2. How did you hear about (or obtain) the 2007 Racial Justice resource?

- Website
- Denominational
- Source
- Mail
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. In what context/setting did you use the material?

4. What suggestions do you have to improve the resource?

Please send us prayers, songs, liturgies, stories and other material that we could use in future versions of this resource. Thank you!







# INTRODUCTORY RESOURCES

# REMEMBERING THE PAST, TRANSFORMING THE PRESENT

By Adele Halliday

*Adele Halliday is a member of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. A curriculum writer, graduate student, and African-Canadian educator, Adele currently works in the Ethnic Ministries Unit of The United Church of Canada.*

Today most people would agree that the trans-Atlantic slave trade as an institution was systemic racial injustice perpetuated against African peoples. Yet at the time it was socially acceptable—even justified—by churches and religious leaders of the day. A heinous practice, slavery caused the cultural genocide, suffering, and death of millions of African slaves over hundreds of years. As a result, the passing of Britain's 1807 Abolition of Slavery Act, which levied a fine of £100 for every slave found aboard a British ship, was a cause for great hope and celebration for abolition activists and those involved in the anti-slavery movement.

Although it was the first law to be passed against slavery, the Act did not address the institution of slavery as a whole, nor denounce racism. Slavery continued until almost the mid-1800s in Britain. Further, these legal changes did not change broader systemic inequities faced by African slaves, nor did it change people's individual racist attitudes. Racism—systemic, structural, institutional, cultural, and personal—continued, and the descendants of slaves still suffered.

In today's contexts, the descendants of former slaves live and work alongside the descendants of former slave owners in ways that their ancestors could never have imagined. Yet the anti-slavery activists of yesterday would cringe to know that while the forced migration of African peoples across continents to work as slaves has been legally abolished, other forms of slavery continue: human trafficking, the plight of migrant women, bonded labourers, and child labourers are some forms of modern slavery. Even today, slavery as an institution continues, and systemic racial injustice perpetuated against marginalized peoples is still an ugly reality.

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act to end the slave trade is therefore a bittersweet anniversary. It is a time to recall and reflect on historic and contemporary forms of racism and slavery; to examine and analyze intersecting oppressions of colonialism, capitalism, and globalization; to examine the church's complacency in perpetuating racism and modern forms of slavery; and to take tangible action against racism with the hope of creating broader systemic change.

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**With a view to closing those dark chapters in history and as a means of reconciliation and healing, we invite the international community and its members to honour the memory of the victims of these tragedies. We further note that some have taken the initiative of regretting or expressing remorse or presenting apologies, and call on all those who have not yet contributed to restoring the dignity of the victims to find appropriate ways to do so and, to this end, appreciate those countries that have done so.**

The United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and  
Related Intolerance

Durban, South Africa,  
31 August 31 - September 8, 2001

# SERMON NOTES ON THE LECTIONARY TEXTS FOR MARCH 25, 2007

By Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton

*Dr. Karen Hamilton is an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada currently serving in ministry as the General Secretary of The Canadian Council of Churches. Her doctoral work is in the area of Old Testament and Preaching. She has served in numerous leadership positions in the UCC and has extensive experience in inter-faith dialogue. She is a long-time member and Chair of The World Federalists of Canada, an NGO working on issues of global governance and is a member of council for the international World Federalist Movement, an organization which was nominated for the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize. She was recently elected to serve as one of the International Presidents for the World Conference of Religions for Peace.*

## **Joshua 5: 9-12**

*A play on words*

This passage from the book of Joshua begins, as many significant Biblical moments do, with a play on words. God declares that he has 'rolled' away from the people the disgrace of Egypt. The Hebrew verb for 'roll' is related to the name of the place where this statement is made—Gilgal. It is common Biblical practice to name a place for the significant event that is recognized there. For now and forever, the disgrace of Egypt is rolled away from the people and the place where this reality is declared is forever marked by a name. A physical reality that is over and done with is marked with a physical place of remembrance and a name that will 'roll' onwards through the generations.

A people who were bound in slavery in Egypt are now not only free but their freedom is marked in a particular way and the moving on from that slavery into the new life of freedom is memorialized in a particular way.

On this 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the slave trade in Britain, how do we do that in

our time and place—both those of us whose ancestors were enslaved and those of us whose ancestors did the enslaving? How do we both 'roll' away from the institution of slavery and its repercussions that still reverberate to this day and memorialize it/remember it in a way that enables us to live and to proclaim 'Never Again'?

This Joshua passage goes on to rehearse the way in which the Passover feast was kept in that place of memory and moving on. The Passover feast was, and is to this day for our Jewish sisters and brothers, the celebration of liberation from slavery. It is a feast, a ritual of enactment. Each time it is celebrated it brings close to those enacting it the realities of both slavery and liberation. The slavery is not to be forgotten. It is in the telling and re-telling of the story, each year in the Biblical and Jewish tradition, that the commitment to liberation is maintained and it is maintained for all peoples.

Two hundred years have passed, yet we need to ask this year and every year how we will name slavery for the evil it is and, in the very naming of it, continue to be freed of its on-going, de-humanizing reality for slaved and slavers both? Do we need signs, symbols, rituals to do that? What would those be?

## **Psalm 32**

*How much is too much?*

In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Psalm 32 is entitled "The Joy of Forgiveness". That title is not in the original Hebrew, but is a fairly recent addition to the text. One can see why biblical translators/editors/formatters added this title in modern times.

The Psalms are the songbook of the people of Israel, a song book that Christians, sharing as we do much of the biblical texts with our

Jewish sisters and brothers, have inherited.

The first verse of this Psalm begins by declaring: "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Happy indeed! But, what counts as a transgression? And who does the forgiving?

Well, our faith and our tradition proclaim that it is God who does the forgiving—but what kinds of transgressions does God forgive? As we recognize this 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the slave trade, we might find ourselves asking whether God forgives those who were slavers, those who profited from slavery, those who separated the members of slave families, those who beat their slaves, sometimes even to death? And if God forgives those who transgressed in those ways, what does that forgiveness mean? Does it entail a recognition of the nature of slavery as sin? Does it entail recognizing one's complicity in it?

Well, our faith and our tradition tell us too that in the face of transgressions the calling is to repentance and that repentance is always to God. We repent to God because the transgressions by which we hurt each other are, because of God's deep involvement in humanity, transgressions before God. We repent before God and that means that we turn in another direction in terms of our behaviour (that is what the Hebrew word for 'repentance' means—to turn in another direction).

Verse 8 says: "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." But where was that instruction and teaching and counsel in the days of slavery? And what about those many, many—including the Apostle Paul—who believed in slavery? And furthermore, the many, many who used the Bible itself to justify it?

Where was their instruction? Verse 5 says: "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin". But what if one does not see one's actions—those of the

propagators and profiteers of slavery for instance—as a transgression? What is the role of community—locally, regionally, nationally and internationally in naming transgressions?

This Psalm raises so many questions.

Taken as a whole, as the songbook of the people of Israel, as the songbook from which Christians too now sing, the witness of the Psalms is that people can indeed cry out to the Holy One, cry out with all their hurts and oppressions and un-justices and be heard. Often, though clearly not always, we human beings recognize when we are participating in something for which we need forgiveness. Sometimes, though, we do that recognizing only from hindsight.

How do we now, as descendants both of those who perpetuated slavery and those who were caught in its ugly snares, move forward, in the model of God, as those who forgive and those who are forgiven?

What does repentance, what does turning in another direction, look like in 2007?

## **2 Corinthians 5: 16-21**

*Prince Henry the Navigator*

This letter of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth makes clear in these particular verses the life-transforming reality that has happened. The Corinthians, and we ourselves, are no longer to regard anyone from a human perspective. Anyone in Christ is a new creation. God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and in Christ, God has reconciled the whole world to himself.

What does it mean, then, in verse 19 that trespasses are not counted against them/us? How bad can something that is done be, and yet not be, counted? Do we have all the help we need in discerning what is a trespass in God's eyes? What does 'counting' mean?

When I was in my last years of elementary school we had a section in our social studies

curriculum on explorers. One of those explorers was Prince Henry the Navigator. We learned about his travels and how those explorations changed the world in economic and political ways.

What we did not learn about, however, was another way in which he changed the world. The Portuguese Prince Henry also founded the slave trade. In Norman Cantor's book, *The Last Knight*, we read about how Henry organized expeditions along the west coast of Africa to find gold and bring back Black slaves. The slave trade was the most lucrative avenue of commerce and industry prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Beginning with Prince Henry, the Portuguese monopolized it until challenged by the Dutch and the English in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Black slaves were used domestically in Portugal and its colony in the Azores and were traded to Spanish Christians and to Muslims. The Portuguese had huge plantations in Brazil on which their African slaves provided the labour.

At the time, Cantor tells us, Christian theologians were still disputing whether the African slaves had souls (see p. 123). They eventually decided in the affirmative but did not question the institution of slavery. These realities were never mentioned in my elementary school education.

From the perspective of our time and place it is clear, clear, clear that this inauguration of slavery is a trespass—perhaps THE trespass—but it was one that was actively supported by Christian leaders and people for centuries, people who believed deeply and passionately in the words of the Apostle Paul that in Christ they were a new creation and that God did not count their trespasses against them (not that they saw slavery as one).

God, in Christ, has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In Christ we become the

righteousness of God and we must go forward that way. Recognizing the past, being deeply aware that we may well be involved in things right now that we do not see as trespass, but that future Christians will see as trespass, but still going forward. What does a ministry of reconciliation look like on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain? What does it look like internationally, nationally, regionally and locally?

Be that ministry of reconciliation!

### **Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

#### *Lost and found*

(Note: When a lectionary reading skips verses as this one does, always look at what has been skipped. In this case it is another parable about 'lost and found'.)

In this lectionary passage, in this parable, Jesus makes very clear how God welcomes back, with open arms, those that we might, indeed would, consider to be sinners. So that message is clear—no matter how bad we might consider the sin, if we long to turn away from it, if we repent and turn in another direction, turn for home, so to speak, God always longs to welcome us back.

How hard is it to imagine, though, God killing the fatted calf for, and celebrating the return of, those who inflicted so much suffering on the ones who were in slavery? How hard is it to imagine those who resisted slavery or were abolitionists as the elder brother? How hard is it to imagine the Father in the parable as a Black person and the Prodigal Son as a white, privileged man who for many years benefited from the institution of slavery. (One has to hold in tension father/son relationship with this particular imagining but it is worth trying for the sake of grasping the radical message of forgiveness that this passage proclaims.)

## Introductory Resources

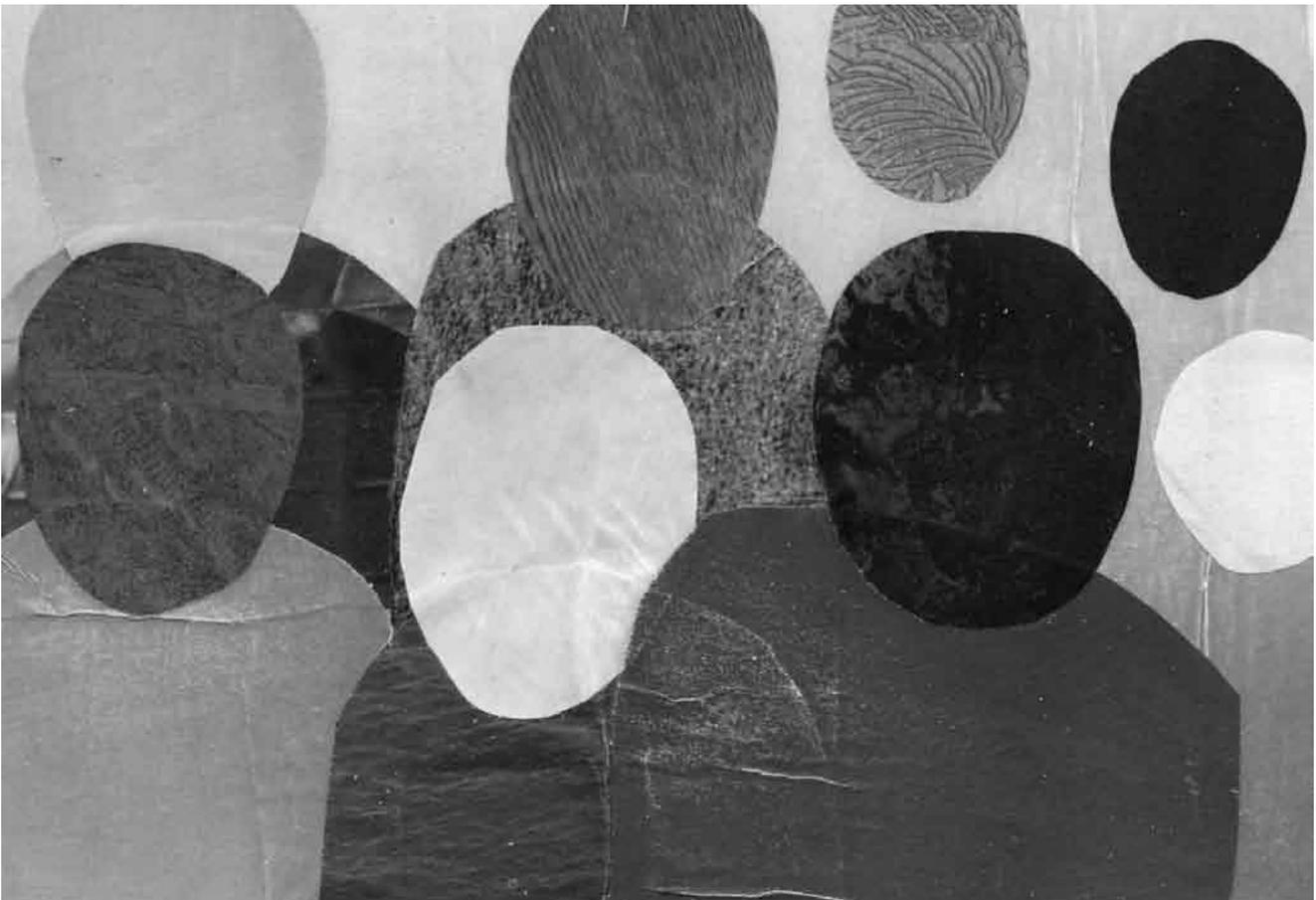
And again the kind of question that we have been asking over and over again in these sermon notes: Two hundred years on from the abolition of the slave trade, how do we rejoice and celebrate the repentance?

How do we ensure that abolition and justice and equality and life continue to be found when it is so easy to lose them in compromise and self-absorption and stress and busyness?

What does reconciliation look like in a time and a place in which slavery as an institution is 200 years gone but its legacy of colonialism and racism lives on?

How did the Prodigal son and the elder brother work out their relationship and their reality after the party was over?

Journey towards Reconciliation indeed!



credit: Bushra Junaid