# Vignettes of Canadian Black History A Service for Black History Month

## Invitation

“Hush! Hush!” (MV 167—a cappella)

## Welcome and Announcements

## Acknowledgment of Traditional Territory

We acknowledge this sacred land we gather on  
As the traditional territory of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First Nations.  
As Treaty members, we commit to Reconciliation.  
We honour the heritage and gifts of Metis people.

## We Light the Christ Candle

Friends, the Light of Christ!

## Song

“Over My Head” (MV 88)

## Vignettes of Canadian Black History

Black people have been present in the land we call Canada since long before confederation. Multilinguist Mathieu da Costa, of partial African ancestry, is the first known Black person to arrive on this land. Da Costa is understood to have spoken Dutch, English, French, Portuguese, Mi’kmaq, and pidgin Basque, and because of his ability to learn new languages traveled with João Fernandes Lavrador, exploring Greenland and the north Atlantic coast of Canada as early as 1499. Additionally da Costa would voyage with Pierre Dugua de Mons and Samuel de Champlain.

## We Confess Our Common Faith: A New Creed

Please join me as we share the story of our hearts (VU p. 918).

## Song

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” (African-American spiritual):

**Swing low, sweet chariot  
Coming for to carry me home;  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.**

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,  
Coming for to carry me home?  
A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home.

**REFRAIN**

If you get there before I do,  
Coming for to carry me home;  
Tell all my friends I'm coming too,  
Coming for to carry me home.

**REFRAIN**

I'm sometimes up, I’m sometimes down,  
Coming for to carry me home;  
But still my soul feels heavenly bound,  
Coming for to carry me home.

**REFRAIN**

## Confession

Let’s pray:

Gracious God, Jesus our Anointed,

We pray for your mercy today, knowing that anything short  
 Of just living is not the kingdom of heaven,  
 The living arrangement we live and long for.  
At the heart of your renewed creation  
 Is a quest for healthy relationships  
 And the building up of marginalized individuals and communities.  
We ask for the courage to hear and support  
 The stories of racialized individuals and communities  
 That we might meet Jesus in the story  
 And be transformed.  
Amen.

## We Pass the Peace

The Peace of Christ be with you!  
**And also with your spirit.**

## Vignettes of Canadian Black History

The story that is dawning on the minds of more and more Canadians in recent years is that slavery connected to European colonialism existed in Canada for about 205 years. It began with the arrival of Olivier Le Jeune, an African boy from Madagascar, about 7 years old, in New France (modern-day Quebec). There is little known about Le Jeune, but he was educated by a Jesuit priest, Father Le Jeune, and upon baptism took the name Olivier after the colony’s head clerk Olivier Letardif. He would later take the priest’s surname. By the time Le Jeune died in May 1654, it is thought that his status had changed from slave to free domestic servant.

## The Offering

We, the United Church of Canada, have made a commitment to becoming an anti-racist denomination. Another way of saying this is that we are committed to developing healthy relationships with individuals and communities, especially those experiencing marginalization, because this was a focus of Jesus’ redemptive work.

Thank you for being invested in this transformative work, and thank-you for being dedicated to living out this incredible vision for our community and the world. Your time, talents, and gifts make a huge difference, and we are forever grateful to see what God is doing in you and in our community.

## **Offering Song**

“I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (VU 575, 2X)

## Offering Prayer

**God, bless these gifts  
 May they be put to good use  
 Here at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ United Church  
 And around the world.  
Amen.**

## Vignettes of Canadian Black History

Marie-Joseph Angélique was an enslaved woman living in what is now called “Old Montreal” in New France (modern-day Quebec). She was convicted of setting fire to her slaveholder’s house and causing much of Old Montreal to burn in a chain reaction of events.

It has long been assumed that Angélique was guilty of the crime, but in more recent years historians have questioned her trial, suggesting that her conviction was based more on her reputation than on credible evidence. Angélique seems to have been viewed at the time as a rebellious “runaway slave”. Her story exposes the challenges that Blacks who longed to be free faced in the early days of Canada.

## Scripture

Mark 1:29–39

## Song

“Wade in the Water” (African-American spiritual):

**Wade in the water  
Wade in the water children  
Wade in the water  
God’s gonna trouble the water.**

Who’s that young girl dressed in red  
Wade in the water  
Must be the children that Moses led  
God’s gonna trouble the water.

**REFRAIN**

Who’s that young girl dressed in white  
Wade in the water  
Must be the children of the Israelite  
God’s gonna trouble the water.

**REFRAIN**

Who’s that young girl dressed in blue  
Wade in the water  
Must be the children that’s coming through  
God’s gonna trouble the water.

**REFRAIN**

You don’t believe I’ve been redeemed  
Wade in the water  
Just so the whole lake goes looking for me  
God’s gonna trouble the water.

**REFRAIN**

## Sermon

Friends, we are on an exciting adventure as we explore what it means to be human together. Humans are complex beings, which means that human relationships are challenging and have the capacity to be highly volatile. The joy for us, however, who are in Jesus, is that we get to look upon every challenge as an opportunity for the birthing of a new world.

I always keep the book *The Magician’s Nephew* by CS Lewis in the back of my mind. As Digory and Polly find their way into the unborn world of what is to become Narnia, they are there when the Creator, the mighty lion Aslan, begins to sing creation’s song.

The Coldplay song, “A Head Full of Dreams” reminds me of the Chronicles of Narnia with its opening line, “Oh I think I’ve landed in a world I hadn’t seen…”

These works of art remind me that being a follower of Jesus is being a people caught up in the imagination of God—if you can imagine it, then it can happen.

Revelation 7:9 says this:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

This is to say that we are dealing with a God who has a big imagination.

And I know that this could come across as, perhaps, a one-size-fits-all colonial scripture, I also think of that text from Amos 7:9, which says:

Are you not like the Ethiopians to me,  
O people of Israel? says the Lord.  
Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt,  
 and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?

The idea here being presented to us is that other nations and peoples have experienced liberation in the same way that our ancestors in faith did, and we can attribute it to the same source of our own liberation. This isn’t to cast our God on anyone else, but rather to name to our own community; that whatever this source of liberation be that we speak of, we do not own it, nor do we have any control over it.

As the scripture says,

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8)

The Spirit, which is of Jesus, isn’t held captive to our religious beliefs, but invites us to, as one song says, “colour outside the lines”.

When we think of today’s story one line sticks out to me  
and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Is the Spirit that speaks to you giving you the courage to stand up to the demon of racism and inviting you and your community to speak truth to power in such a way as it causes others to have no response?

I’m not talking about shutting down deep conversations (for there are many who really have no idea), but rather allowing others to see the world inside of suffering, leading them to respond with empathy, saying to themselves, “I didn’t know…”. End of conversation.

Anti-racism work is really life-affirming work. Demons seek to destroy life, but we, the people of God, seek to bear witness to the life we have in Jesus, the Christ.

We continue to peer into what should be our Narnia—the world we hadn’t seen—the world as God sees it, where people of every nation, tribe, language, and more are able to bear witness to their own liberation and autonomy, for the demon of racism has been stood up to, opposed, and vanquished.

As the prophet declared,

If you do not stand firm in faith,  
You shall not stand at all (Isaiah 7:9*b*)

## Song

“Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79—after the first two verses are sung the musician is welcome to continue playing this song in the background during the Pastoral Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer. As the Lord’s Prayer ends singers continue into the final verse.)

## Pastoral Prayer

And we continue in prayer saying the words of Jesus… (The Lord’s Prayer)

## Song

“Spirit, Open My Heart” (MV 79, v.4)

## Blessing and Sending Out

The amazing grace of our teacher, Jesus Christ  
The extravagant love of God  
And the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit  
 Be with you.

## Postlude

“I’m So Glad” (African-American spiritual)

I’m so glad Jesus lifted me (3X)  
Singing, glory, hallelujah  
Jesus lifted me

*―The Rev. Adam Kilner is minister at Dunlop United Church in Sarnia, Ontario.*