

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**September 3, 2017**

Wallace Charles Smith, D.Min.  
Senior Minister



Just about all of us have watched the devastating scenes from Hurricane Harvey, a storm that has struck southern Texas with catastrophic results. Many of the most heart-wrenching photos and images have come from the city of Houston, the fourth largest city in our nation. Having just been in Houston a few weeks ago attending the Progressive National Baptist Convention, I was astonished when I saw footage of the main highway -- that stretches from Bush Airport to downtown -- engulfed with flood waters. This main thoroughfare no longer looked like a roadway, but a river strewn with vehicles nearly submerged in the deluge. I could not help but reflect on the words of the sixteenth century poet John Bradford, who when witnessing a group of prisoners on their way to execution said, "But for the grace of God goes John Bradford." When we realize the fragility of life and the ways in which destruction is always only a moment away from us all, but for the grace of God go any of us. A number of Shiloh members and friends have loved ones in southern Texas; our deepest sympathies, thoughts and prayers go out to those who have experienced loss during this significant upheaval. One commentator estimated that the cost of this destruction could be 180 billion dollars, exceeding the cost of Hurricane Katrina.

Shiloh has always responded with overwhelming generosity in a crisis or natural disaster. Today, we will receive a special offering for the victims of the flood. We will make our checks payable to Shiloh and designate in the memo, For Hurricane Harvey Emergency Relief. We will receive another special offering next Sunday so that we can come prepared to make significant contributions. We also are asking every man, woman, boy and girl in our congregation to pray mightily for that region of our country and for all those who have experienced such cataclysmic loss. Remember the words of John Bradford, "But for the grace of God goes John Bradford," but replace his name with each of our names and remember how blessed we are in so many ways.

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**August 27, 2017**

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He burst into the American psyche as a glib, cigarette smoking ultimately cool dude. He was urbane, sophisticated and funny as all get out. Once he got our mouths open in laughter, he jammed the truth in our throats. He was the one and only Dick Gregory. Martin Luther King Jr. called America's attention to the blatant unfairness of America's Jim Crow system, through his marches and sit ins. Dick Gregory, in his own inimical way, called the absurdity of segregation by making the nation laugh at itself.

In those days, long before Johnny Carson, Stephen Colbert or Jimmy Falon, the talk show host everyone watched was Jack Parr. Gregory was a frequent visitor on that program sending studio audiences, musicians and production staff off into gales of laughter. As the people behind the cameras were howling, Dick Gregory was the modicum of cool, never moving a muscle unless punctuating one of his quips through the raising of an eye brow.

We must not forget what was going on in the nation at this time. Segregation was not just a philosophical principle up for debate, in the South it was the law of the land. Although, segregation was de facto in the South, its Northern version, de jure segregation was deeply ensconced in the Northern mindset. The broadcast world of television had become a cash crop for the Networks. The South wielded a huge influence over this new medium, and if they resisted any show, it was a foregone conclusion that program would not make it. The legendary Nat King Cole had his weekly show cancelled because Southern states refused to air it. Dick Gregory, with enormous courage marched into the belly of the beast, refused to blink, and in spite of enormous pressure, saw his stand-up comedy become some of the most popular on the airwaves.

According to the Detroit Free Press, Gregory got his start when, although penniless, he received a call to fill in for Irwin Corey at the Playboy Club in Chicago. He borrowed a quarter for the bus fare to the sight and the rest is history.

I remember his biting satire and stinging social commentary. One of his best-known lines was, "Last time I was down South I went into a restaurant and this white waitress said to me: we don't serve coloreds here. I said that's alright, I don't eat them. Bring me a whole fried chicken".

Roughly two years ago Mr. Gregory was at Shiloh when he attended a rally led by Louis Farrakhan. Although I had only met him briefly before, he embraced me like a long lost friend. Dick Gregory was a man who never met a stranger.

Last week, Dick Gregory was called home to be with God. He was 84 years old. Although America may not remember, he was one of the giants on whose shoulders the Civil Rights Movement rested. For Mr. Gregory, the words of the old hymn provide a fitting tribute, "O when you give the best of your service, telling the world that the Savior has come, be not dismayed when men won't receive you, He understands and will say well done."

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**August 20, 2017**

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Today, we pause to celebrate and observe our annual Homecoming service and welcome back our friend and brother beloved, Dr. William S. Epps, Senior Pastor of Second Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California. Over the years, Dr. Epps has electrified us with his powerful and profound sermons on Homecoming Sundays. We look forward today to his delivery of another inspiring Word from the Lord.

The appalling and horrendous events in Charlottesville, Virginia last weekend were dreadful reminders that America's struggles with race equality continues. Dr. Eddie Glaude states in his book, Democracy in Black, "*America experiences a value gap that can be traced back to the Founding Fathers' inability to deal with the problem of race.*" To this point, Thomas Jefferson eloquently declared that all men are created equal, yet, the third President of the United States affirmed and also believed that a slave constituted only 3/5 of a person. Ever since Jefferson and others who shared his beliefs affirmed such distorted points of view, our nation has consistently operated with a value gap between the rights of Blacks and whites that also perpetuate and enable suppression. The Black Lives Matters Movement, ColorofChange, the NAACP (for many years) and other Black activists organizations, have expressed apt concern for the nation's racial inequality and evidences of widespread suppression.

The fact is, that from the beginning of our democracy, Black lives have not been valued equally, respectfully or favorably as white lives. On March 6, 1857, Chief Justice Roger Taney, a staunch supporter of slavery, wrote for the Court's majority decision on the Dred Scott v. Sanford case. Recall that Scott was a slave who sued for his freedom based on his contention that his owner, an Army doctor, lived for a time in free states. Taney's opinion declared that "all blacks -- slaves as well as free -- were not and could never become citizens of the United States, and that because Scott was Black, he was not a citizen and therefore had no right to sue."

Some good-willed Americans optimistically believed that the North's victory in the Civil War and the cessation of slavery would eradicate the value gap between Black and white Americans. To the contrary; the political compromise reached between the Republican Party and the Democrats ushered in Reconstruction, which led to an increased devaluation of Black lives known as "Jim Crow." During the Reconstruction era, former slaves were free in name only. Lynchings and other forms of white brutality imposed on Black Americans "validated" and supported the Dred Scott decision, that Blacks had no rights protected by the U.S. Constitution.

President Trump's blatant reluctance to condemn white supremacy in response to the Charlottesville attack was appalling, but not shocking when you consider value gaps and skewed racial ideologies that have prevailed for years between the lives of Black and white Americans. It goes without saying that Trump's response would be profoundly different, and proclaimed with haste, if the violent attacks were incited by Blacks and Muslims against whites. We must continue to pray for genuine, authentic and rightful equality in our nation, and we as a church must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to be "the voice of justice for the Black Church in America."

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**August 13, 2017**

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Senior Minister



Homecoming is a celebratory tradition in the African American churches that stems primarily from the South. It is a time of reflection, reaffirmation, renewal, and rededication of lost souls, visitation of members who have united with other churches, and an exciting time of fellowship with family and friends. For 153 years, Shiloh has paused during the “lazy-hazy-crazy days of summer” to celebrate all of the norms that homecoming represents: spirit-filled worship, Biblical preaching and teaching, personal testimonies and lively and robust singing. In addition to safeguarding and maintaining our honored traditions of homecoming, we incorporate the innovations of social media to highlight and promote social justice as an ongoing ministry at Shiloh, and to channel all of our homecoming information, ministries, activities, and events through the online #ShilohDCHomecomingJoy. Selfies, for example, have become a global phenomenon and a big part of our everyday lives. This year, we will hold our first *selfie celebration* on Homecoming Sunday! During our time of greeting, we will be encouraged to take selfies of ourselves, with friends and with our families and post them on our Facebook pages and other social media accounts.

The Bible has a consistent theme of redemption, *Ye who are weary come home*. Homecoming at Shiloh is a time when souls weary of mega-church entertainment and prosperity preaching disguised as Gospel can return and find many of Shiloh’s traditions intact, and yet see evidence of innovation in our outreach to the community, in how we plan and promote our ministry programs and how we stream to make available our worship services through social media. Ultimately, our intentional balance between tradition and innovation will help us achieve our theme in, *“Becoming the voice of justice for the Black church in America.”*

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**August 6, 2017, 2017**  
Wallace Charles Smith, D.Min.  
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Our theme for the next five years will be, ***“To be the voice of justice for the Black Church in America.”*** The Biblical traditions for the Jews have always been that God wanted the chosen people to be different from other nations. They were to be the voice of justice throughout the ancient near east. The gods of the ancient world were often neither fair nor just. Israel’s existence was the result of God directing Moses to go down into Egypt and declare to Pharaoh, *Let my people go*. In ancient Palestine, men possessed the power to treat women and children as little more than slaves. Children could be mercilessly beaten for a minor disobedience. And, women could be abused and even divorced for non-adherence to the tiniest of a husband’s whims or desires. The history of the prophetic traditions of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos was characterized by Elijah’s facing down of Jezebel, Isaiah’s vision of a highway where the righteous could walk without fear and Amos’ notion that *judgment would run down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream*.

In the New Testament, the call for God’s people to treat each nation and individual fairly and equitably continues. In Jesus’ first sermon at his home church in Nazareth, He read from the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18-21), *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”* Both Old and New Testaments are anchored in the notion that God is on the side of the oppressed.

During the dismal days of slavery, our ancestors, who were wrested from our mother continent and forced to work from sun-up to Sun-set, were sustained through the stories of God’s work to overturn life’s inequities. They cheered themselves with the stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. What they heard in these stories was God was not outside the furnace putting people in, but inside the furnace getting people out.

We are living in one of the most challenging epochs in modern history. Racial divisions are being encouraged, the social safety net that has provided food and shelter for the disenfranchised is being unraveled one thread at a time. Majority churches are too often seduced by the lure of entertainment religion and cultural quietism. In these challenging times, the world needs the liberating message of the Black Church. Our theme recommits us to the legacy of justice and freedom which goes deeply into our DNA. Over the next five years, we will work through each of our ministries to become the ***voice of justice for the Black Church in America***.

# *The Pastor's Pen*

**July 20, 2017**

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Senior Minister



Many thanks to all who participated in last Saturday's Stewardship Planning Session. I could sense the engagement and commitment of participants at the outset to stay the course to get the job done. The responses and enthusiasm of participants were examples of a five-star approach we aspire to achieve through our planning. Our next steps will be to follow up and monitor the status of our work in the following core areas: *Congregational Care, Education, Outreach, Social Justice* and *Worship*. As we face the challenges of ministering in an increasingly gentrifying community, our vision can only be fulfilled by employing strategic and intentional efforts in all that we plan and implement.

The vision for the next five years is "***To become the voice of justice for the Black Church in America.***" The present administration has already demonstrated how vitally important it is to keep our initiatives at the forefront of today's socially-heated climate, especially when executive orders are constantly being directed to roll back all of the Obama era initiatives.

In spite of the killings of Black males at the hands of law enforcement and the cries that rang out through national Black Lives Matter protests, the Attorney General of the United States indicated that "the Department of Justice would 'pull back' on the federal scrutiny of police departments for civil rights violations against people of color," to include confiscating and indefinitely withholding property if/when enforcers are suspicious of activities. In effect, this amounts to a violation of a constitutional right, which is protection from illegal search and seizure. The entire Black Lives Matter movement has been rendered immaterial by the power in the pen of the Executive Branch.

Throughout the coming years we will look for ways to develop and design plans to implement our vision. We are asking each planning area to determine how our vision can be incorporated in all our programs. One example was offered by the Worship/Music/Evangelism planning session -- *to have our choirs join Outreach and offer music at some of our Saturday fellowship meals*. Our choirs already do an outstanding job of providing Christmas music at various care centers. Providing that same service at select fellowship meals would be in keeping with our vision.

It will take all of us to develop creative and innovative ideas, plans and processes to keep our vision alive throughout the year. As we attest so often, if we take one step, God will take two.