# Ancestors and AncestryA Service for Black History Month

## Call to Worship

One: Look back! Look back with courage!
**All: Face the truth God reveals to you!**One: Look forward! Look forward with hope!
**All: Look to the future! See possibilities growing from the seeds of lessons learned!**One: There is NO shame in learning history! **There is NO shame in relearning history!**
**All: Let us learn and unlearn history together.**One Wisdom is vindicated by all her children.
**All: And all God’s children proclaim: “So be it!” “Amen!”**

## Hymn

“Bless Now, O God, the Journey” (VU 633—words only; sung to the tune of VU 123 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna―see Metrical Index 7676D)

## Prayer of Approach

Almighty God,
Source of Life and Life itself.
Your Holy Spirit gathers us into your presence
As a hen gathers her chicks to herself.
In the safety of this sacred space—virtual or real—help us settle into this time
Of being together: individuals in shared community through Christ and with Christ.
Help us push aside distracting thoughts that impede our learning and our listening.
Help us uncover our fears: drive out each one with your perfect and perfecting love
So that we can be changed in mind and will be changed in heart.
Thank you for accepting us as teachable: thank you for accepting us as willing disciples willing to grow in our faith, in our Spirits, and in our connection to you and to one another.
This, we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16
Psalm 22:23–31
Romans 4:13–25
Mark 8:31–38 or 9:2–9

## Prayer of Confession

Compassionate Creator, look with mercy upon us as we name our collective brokenness:
We name our resistance to unpack traditions and to engage in difficult conversations;
we name our willingness to remain estranged from that which challenges us or frightens us;
we name constructs of superiority—language that “others,” biases that entrench;
And we name the isms we carry in our thinking that is carried over into our living.
We name other truths about ourselves in this moment of silence…
Compassionate Creator,
Most Loving Parent,
Forgive us our transgressions, as we forgive those who have transgressed against us.
This we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Assurance

Friends in Christ, hear the words of the psalmist in Psalm 103:10‒13 (NRSV):

[God] does not deal with us according to our sins,
 nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
 so great is [God’s] steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
 so far [God] removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
 so [God] has compassion for those who fear him.

Thanks be to God for forgiveness.

## Sermon Brain Food

I’m a history grad who doesn’t know all my own history.
I’m biracial but I am racialized as Black.
I thought I was a Canadian, but I know and understand in my head and in my heart that I am a settler on stolen land.
So, I have questions.
How do I identify myself? To whom do I belong? Who are my people?
I am the Black great-grand-daughter of Orange Lodge members.
It was what it was in Canada.
My great-aunt—my maternal grandfather’s sister―
Spoke in racial and cultural slurs about anyone not from Northern Ireland.
She used the “N” word about me before I was born.
I’m not sure if she used it after I was born because we had no relationship.
Because my grandfather learned to love me:
It took him
four weeks, three days,
and a few hours―apparently.
And he never stopped. He’s dead, and I know he still loves me.

It’s so easy for me to centre my Whiteness because it’s what I know.
Whiteness raised me, clothed me, fed me, educated me, and taught me about Christianity.

I am learning my Black history.
I am learning Black histories.
Do you see what I did there? I turned histories into a plural
Because there is more than one.
There is more than one Black history
Because there is more than one Black person.
But
If there is one common ancestor,
It is a continent full of countries
Full of folx
It is our Mother
The Motherland
Africa.
To many of us in exile from our selves
And from our histories
She is a stranger of mythic and epic proportions.
Africa is Matriarch and her children bless the nations.

Who is Abraham?
The trunk of the tree that gives rise
To a branch of Christianity
A branch of Judaism
A branch of Islam.
Abraham is patriarch.
Childless Abraham and Childless Sarah
Receive a promise: that they will father and mother
Many nations:
Their offspring will be as numerous as stars in the sky
Or grains of sand on a seashore.
We are the grains of sand,
We are the stars.
We are their offspring. We are the children of promise.
We can look back in our sacred stories and say with certainty:
“There! There is our father! There is our mother! This is our family tree.”
We find strength in connection: strength from looking back
Which empowers us to move forward into the future.

My DNA tells stories in a language that I can’t understand on my own;
I have to pay a company to decipher what is mine anyway:
To unravel the mysteries of what is in me―
In my own body that only I own―
To uncover a history that was stolen from me
When slavery stole
My ancestors from their homes.
My family and I can go as far back as Jamaica
But the branch has been cut off after that.
There is a void the size of an ocean
And as deep as a cargo hold full of human beings
Fetid and fettered
In chains
Stacked like so much cordwood on a country estate.
Africa is a backward glance over the shoulder
Then a line on the horizon.
Then a distant memory.
Then, what?
And we have kept moving forward.
We don’t know villages or names.
We don’t know our patriarchs and matriarchs.

The Sankofa
The bird symbol
Teaches us that there is no shame in looking back.
The Sankofa stands with her feet facing forward but her head turned back to the past
Perhaps she is reaching for the egg she hides in her wing?
Sankofa stands in the present: seeking answers from history that will lead her into the future.
Sankofa is a lesson I have learned: she is hope to me as I continue to learn my histories
As a child of the African Diaspora.

We look back to Abraham and Sarah: Patriarch and Matriarch
Learners of their purpose journeying on a road paved by God.
They thought they knew who they were―until God said, “You are more. So much more! Son and daughter of the covenant, you are so much more.”

We, in the Abrahamic Diaspora, are covered in that covenant. We are all more: so much more than we think we are.

## Response

“To Abraham and Sarah” (VU 634)

## Prayers of the People

God of Transfiguration
Your power reveals truth
In all its beauty, in all its difficulty, in all its complexity.
You embrace us in our diversities—loving us, accepting us.
We ask you to unite us through the power of your Spirit
So that we may work to manifest your presence
In creation;
Speak in our voices as we raise them in prayer.
God of Transfiguration:
Illuminate systems of exploitation and injustice:
Systems that dislocate and enslave.
Tear down the monuments we build to ourselves and for ourselves:
Cast down self-congratulatory privilege when we seek to pat ourselves on our back
When we are only doing what we should
Or when we are doing nothing and it is you at work.
Lift us out of missions that are photo-ops, and lead us into the ongoing work
Of partnership and community building.
Most Holy God
Lead us away from the lofty places, the pretty places, the safe places
and into the streets and alleys―
Into hospital rooms with lonely patients
Into schoolyards with bullied children―
Into places we can’t see because they are on the margins
But places that are known to you.
Most holy God,
We pray for those known to us…
Gather these prayers in the one Jesus taught us to say when we are together:
Our Father…

## Hymn

“One More Step Along the World I Go” (VU 639)

## Blessing and Sending Forth

Look forward, look back, look outward, look within, and look around! Learn your histories: those of your family and those of your faith. As you do, remember you are a beloved child of God, a precious sibling of Christ, and a treasured companion to the Holy Spirit. Stay blessed and bless up.

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