# Jesus in the Village

# A Service for Black History Month

**One: Jesus enters our village today to the laughter of our children**

All: The graciousness of our elders

**One: The excitement of our friends**

All: The songs of the choir

**One: He has come to us, to the burdens that we carry,**

All: Bringing the peace that we seek, and the hope that we cling to

**All: Jesus enters our village today, and we receive him gladly.**

**Lighting of the Christ Candle**

We light this candle to spread the light of Christ, into the corners which seek to hinder us from the truth—that we are all loved and we are all one.

**Opening Hymn**

“Come Touch our Hearts” (MV 12)

**Opening Prayer**

Loving Creator, we gather to celebrate Black History Month, and we come in thanksgiving and with reverence. As we meet today we pray that our hearts be opened to hearing the stories—current and past—of Black siblings. We celebrate and honour them, for all they have contributed to our world, our villages, and personally to us. Bless our time this day, in the reading of scripture, the prayers of our hearts, and the joy of meeting each other, in this village where you have made your presence known, Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

Merciful God, we come with humble hearts, bringing our shortcomings and failures. We confess that at times we have hindered another’s blessing by the words we speak and the actions we have undertaken. Forgive us when we have failed to support, encourage, or uplift those in need. Forgive us when we have undermined the dreams and aspirations of others or when we have withheld our assistance out of fear and indifference. In your grace lead us to a path of restoration and healing, Amen.

**Hymn**

“Spirit Open My Heart” (MV 79)

**Scripture**

Psalm 147: 1-11; Mark 1: 29-39

**Reflection: Jesus in the Village**

At the dawn of 1942, 11,000 troops were deployed on a special mission to construct a supply route between Alaska and Canada. Among the 11, 000 were 4000 Black segregated soldiers[[1]](#footnote-1). They were segregated to their own infantry because the thought at the time was that the Black soldiers were just not as capable as White soldiers.

For this particular mission, the Black soldiers were tasked with carving out the initial route from the North by clearing a path at least 12,000 kilometers long through virgin wilderness, and meeting up with the path that the White soldiers would be clearing from the South. That path was the foundation for what we now know as the Alaska Highway. How many of us have traveled that highway in these times?

But imagine that task… clearing not just brush but aged forest trees for 12,000 kms, in temperatures that ranged from –32 C° to –55 C°, and everything else that goes along with being exposed to such harsh conditions. But for these 4000, the weather elements were the least of what they had to be concerned about. Because even with such sacrifice to their physical well-being, they also had to contend with discrimination, segregation, and oppression.

These 4000 who were carving out a supply route from Alaska to Canada for over 8 months had to contend only with the supplies that were delivered to them along the route, since they were strictly forbidden to enter the settlements they would encounter along the way. There was no restriction to the White soldiers entering the towns that they would encounter, but it was strongly forbidden for the Black soldiers to enter the villages of the mostly Indigenous people they would come into contact with.

In our scripture of Mark 1: 29-39 we experience a busy Jesus—“Jesus be hustlin’”. Early morning prayers with the guys, then he got wind of Simon Peter’s mother in law being sick, so he went to attend to her. Then by afternoon and into the night people were bringing many sick and hurting people for him to heal and minister to.

That is what we call a full day. By the next morning he was prepared to start all over again. He commenced his day with morning prayers, but this time he went alone. He needed to be renewed, refreshed, refueled to continue his work.

How many times do we need to find a way to renew our bodies and souls so that we may continue our work, whatever our work is? No matter who we are and what we do, we all get to a point where we crave that element of renewal. For some of us, like Jesus, that may look like some time alone, to reconnect with ourselves in quietness. For some of us, that is where we most encounter the Holy.

For others, a refuel comes from being surrounded by people and feeling the love. For some of us, we are renewed by the interactions in the village. Imagine how many of those Black soldiers would have done anything to be able to enter the villages they were passing by.

And imagine how beneficial it would have been for them if they could have experienced the hospitality and generosity of the Indigenous peoples of the area. The opportunity to feel warm acceptance from one people to soothe the pain of oppression from another. How would their lives had changed if they were allowed to go into the village? And whose lives would they have changed if they were allowed to go into the village?

In our scripture, after a busy day and an edifying morning, Jesus decided to change gears. He said: “I’ve done all I can do in these other places. Let us go somewhere else—how about we go to those nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”

I wonder if Jesus was in the villages that the Black soldiers were forbidden to enter. What blessing, or perhaps healing, was blocked by the mandate forbidding them from entering the villages? I am from Antigua in the Caribbean, and the people of my culture would say, “Don’t block my blessing.” How many blessings have we blocked with our “not in my backyard” approach to people who are different from us?

To the homeless—not in my back yard. To members of the LGBTQIA + and Two Spirit community—not in my back yard. To the mentally ill and the drug addicts—not in my back yard. To folks who don’t look like me—not in my back yard. How many blessings have we blocked from folks who could use it the most? How many blessings have we blocked from ourselves by refusing to be neighborly or hospitable?

Jesus says, “I have done a lot of work in these places, I’d like to spread the blessings around a little bit. Let us go somewhere else—how about we go to those other villages to preach? That is why I have come.” And we know what Jesus preached… he preached love, compassion, and selflessness. Jesus urged his followers to love their enemies, to forgive others, and to care for the oppressed and marginalized.

Jesus advocated for respect and fairness for those who had none. These sentiments resonate with the spirit of Black History Month, as it calls us to continue spreading the message of justice, equality, and hope, and to live the message of justice, equality, and hope. The message that Jesus took to the villages is the message we are called to stand on as people of goodwill who celebrate Black history Month.

The message that Jesus took to the villages is a message of hope. Those segregated soldiers who laid the foundation for the Alaska highway swung those axes and those picks, and with every swing came a grunt of effort and pain, and through each wince of pain was a melody ejected, which no doubt was met with the harmony of another, cause that’s how we made it through the hard times….

Each grunt of pain wherein you could find a song was a song of hope. In the face of adversity, my people have persevered with the unwavering hope of Jesus. We are called to be messengers of that hope, sharing the vision of a better world where love and justice prevail.

Each year Black History Month reminds us that the struggle for justice and equality is an ongoing mission. We are called, like Jesus, to go to nearby villages, to spread the message of hope, and to work toward a world where all God's children are treated with dignity, respect, and equality. We are called to ensure that others aren’t hindered from the villages where the blessings of Jesus can be had.

May the lessons of history inspire us to be agents of change in our communities, sharing the message of love and justice for all, Amen.

**Prayers of the People**

Gracious Spirit, as we honour and celebrate Black History Month we reflect upon the life of Jesus, who walked among the people bringing hope, love, and healing to the villages he visited. During this month of remembrance and tribute, we lift up the stories and legacies of Black siblings. We honour their resilience, courage, and perseverance in the face of adversity, just as Jesus demonstrated resilience amidst challenges.

We pray for those who fought against injustice, who led movements for freedom and equality, and who have inspired generations through their wisdom, talents, and leadership. May they be an example for us, as we strive for a world of reconciliation and justice. Guide our efforts to build bridges, dismantle barriers, and foster understanding.

We pray this in Jesus’s name.

**Closing Hymn**

God of the Bible (MV 28)

**Blessing**

Jesus said: I will go into the village. We recognize the call to go forth into the world carrying the light of Christ.
May the spirit of those words guide us as we leave this place
May we not be afraid to share that light with siblings
And may the hope of Christ shine ever brightly in our Black History Month Celebrations, Amen.

—*Pastor Charmain Bailey was born in Antigua and moved to Canada in 1995. She has served at Bedford and Central United Churches in Windsor, Ontario and Trinity United in London. A trained jazz vocalist, she incorporates her passion for singing in her ministry. Charmain became the first Black person to be commissioned in the history of The United Church of Canada, an honour she carries with pride and determination.*

[Watch this video](https://youtu.be/Nwk0F-DzJLs) of Charmain reading the reflection from this service.

1. For more information read : [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/black-soldiers-alaskan-highway-bc-1.6746754](https://can01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cbc.ca%2Fnews%2Fcanada%2Fbritish-columbia%2Fblack-soldiers-alaskan-highway-bc-1.6746754&data=05%7C02%7CASmith%40united-church.ca%7C60cad93260a5482670db08dc1133cca9%7Ccf18b5a826784011931215f0f7157574%7C0%7C0%7C638404161373582522%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=C01y51IrSvvtpQGjt3v2sSWTlJpnH1hqNaaryQMe7BI%3D&reserved=0) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)