



Galatians 3:23-29

Children of God

23 Before the coming of this faith, (a) we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. 24 So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. 25 Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Introduction

Today, we focus on the power of coming together to worship God. We gather to experience something greater than what we experience in solitude. We gather to celebrate the image of God in one another. We gather in love because love is the prime commandment. We gather to reflect on God's presence throughout history. In the Xhosa and Zulu languages of southern Africa, the philosophy of Ubuntu fleshes out this concept. Ubuntu the virtue of humanity; it means "I am because we are." Without Ubuntu, we are incomplete. Ubuntu is a lived experience: walls becoming permeable, dissolving into compassion and praise. Ubuntu is the energy we exchange when we worship God.

Juneteenth: The Newest Federal Holiday

The Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery. The slave masters determined how and when they would inform their slaves of freedom. The federal government paid reparations at that time *to the slave masters*, the same men who had just waged war on the United States, the equivalent of \$8000¹ per slave. Before the news of Emancipation had reached all Americans, Lincoln's promise of 40 acres and a mule was cancelled² by his successor, President Andrew Johnson.

¹ roughly the modern equivalent of \$8000 per slave

² Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Truth Behind 40 Acres and a Mule" *The African American Experience*, accessed online at <<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/the-truth-behind-40-acres-and-a-mule/>> (June 17, 2022)

Systemic racism is our undeniable shared history. It is evidenced today in prisons filled with Black men, in myriad new voter suppression laws, in deadly attacks of gun violence from Buffalo to Charleston to Uvalde.

The Sin of Willful Ignorance

The Emancipation Proclamation did not end slavery. Juneteenth marks the day in 1865—two and a half years after the Proclamation was signed into law—when the Union Army had to deliver a revised Proclamation to Texas, addressing willful ignorance. It read: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive office of the United States, ‘all slaves are free.’ This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves...”³

I am not particularly qualified to preach Juneteenth, other than I am a child of NW Georgia, a historically racist region that, sadly, still suffers the sin of willful ignorance.⁴ Imagine San Francisco schoolchildren not learning about Leland Stanford or Harvey Milk. I was thirty years old when I first heard the story of tenor Roland Hayes, who was raised a few miles from my family home.

Roland Hayes (1887-1977)

On this Juneteenth Father’s Day, I want to share with you the hidden history of the Father of African American concert music,⁵ Roland Hayes, the son of slaves. He was born in 1887, “essentially one generation beyond legalized enslavement.”⁶

Singing in his church choir, young Roland Hayes encountered a traveling pianist, a white man who possessed a phonograph. He played young Roland recordings of Enrico Caruso, the greatest opera star of all time. Hayes said, “That opened the heavens for me. The beauty of what could be done with the voice just overwhelmed me.”⁷

In his teens, Hayes worked in a paperweight foundry shaping metal into doorstops and knickknacks. It was dangerous work. He would leave his shoes untied and the laces loose in case the hot molten metal landed on his feet, and he had to take off his shoes quickly. At sixteen, Roland got too close to the foundry’s conveyor belt and was dragged through the machinery several times. They thought surely, he would die.

The local hospital would not allow a young Black man to stay overnight. So, Roland came home in a body cast, much to his mother’s dismay.⁸ He mended slowly over several months. Hayes interpreted his healing as a sign that God wanted him to do great things: to step out on faith and sing, as a trailblazer of classical music.

Everybody laughed at that idea. Even his mother warned him that both Black and White would be offended by Roland’s appropriation⁹ of European music, the song of the oppressor. This just made him more determined.

Freedom in Christ & Cultural Appropriation

The passages from Galatians are, in part, about cultural appropriation.¹⁰ Paul wrote to the faithful in Galatia who were divided over whose religion Christianity would become culturally, the Jews or the Gentiles or what? Paul exhorted them—and us—to realize that we are all in this spiritual journey together without distinction. Since no one has to code switch¹¹ in the kingdom of heaven, why would we do so at church? Let church be diverse—and messy! That’s the point: many parts, one body. But not neglect to move past all the distinctions and into the universal.

Roland Hayes eventually addressed appropriation by claiming the power of the universal, the virtues of humanity that connect us beyond intellect and emotion.¹² The essence of Ubuntu. When done respectfully (and well), music establishes connections from soul to soul. Lou and I just fell in love with *Dream of the Red Chamber* at the San Francisco Opera, a classical Chinese story with a universal message. (More Ubuntu.) When

³ Melvin Maughmer, “Free Indeed” sermon, June 20, 2021, Sermon Central, accessible online at <<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/free-indeed-melvin-maughmer-jr-sermon-on-freedom-257739>> (Jun 15, 2022)

⁴ Marjorie Taylor Greene represents NW Georgia.

⁵ Robert Sims, “The Vanishing of Harry Pace, Episode 5, Roland Hayes” *Radiolab*, July 2, 2021.

⁶ Christopher Brooks, *Ibid*.

⁷ “A Bouncy Seventy-Five: Roland Hayes, Despite His Age, Gives Concerts, Teaches and Reminisces,” *New York Times*, 3 June 1962, 127.

⁸ She had already lost other children.

⁹ For decades, since the Pacific School of Religion blowup of 2006, wherein a group of mostly-white LGBTQ students used African American spirituals in a liturgy (but changed the words to represent the values of inclusive language), I have struggled with the boundaries of Cultural Appropriation. I struggle when Mayor Breed voices objection to White people in the Black Lives Matter movement. This Wikipedia article offers some good introductory information <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_appropriation#Criticism_of_the_concept>.

¹⁰ Biran K. Blount, *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, *Galatians*.

¹¹ <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code-switching>>

¹² Marva Griffin Carter, “Roland Hayes—Expressor of the Soul in Song (1887-1977),” *The Black Perspective in Music*, Autumn 1977, 188.

we received the tickets, a gift, I thought that surely, I would not follow a story laced with so much culture foreign to my own. I still have trouble with *Così fan tutte*, and I have sung the tenor role several times! (Don't tell anyone that.) When I learned that the original *Red Chamber* novel contained four-hundred incidental characters, I gave up any expectation of connecting with the performance. But wow. Go see it. It's universal—soul singing to soul—and it's brilliant.

A One-Man Record Label & the Original Telemarketer

So, young Roland headed north to join the Fisk University Singers, who toured to raise money for the all-Black university. We'll sing one of Fisk's favorite spirituals at the end of the service. At Fisk, Roland Hayes' voice teacher funded his education, but when she learned that he had taken on part-time jobs, she had him kicked out of the university. Some music teachers want their students to live in the practice rooms. They're not wrong, but they are unrealistic.



He made his way to Boston where he auditioned for other voice teachers, most of whom told him it was impossible for a Black man to sing classical music. Finally, a teacher, a white man, accepted Hayes on the condition that he tell no one and please enter through the back door.

Hayes progressed with this new teacher. He was ready to sing professionally, but Boston venues would not book him. So, he set out to raise some money and promote himself. He called on the wife of the Massachusetts governor for some capital. She turned him down as a promising failure. Undeterred, he got out the local phone book and called random residences. "Hello, I'm calling to promote an amazing young tenor, Roland Hayes, in the style of Caruso. He will knock your socks off! Would you like to help him rent Symphony Hall for his Boston debut?" After many weeks, he had enough money to rent the Symphony Hall—and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He printed tickets and took out ads in the newspaper, and the concert was a huge success. He self-financed recordings with Columbia Records, paying for each pressing of 78s (those are records). He recorded Christian songs and spirituals and Caruso's greatest hits.¹³ You can hear it all on YouTube.

God spared him to sing. Christ freed him to free others. He sold his records door-to-door to middle-class Black families, in the spirit of Ubuntu, "Because I am, we can be."

Soon Hayes traveled to Europe, where the "hide your daughter" kind of racism was rampant. In London, he sang "Were You There" for a Holy Week service. Two days later, a command performance for King George and Queen Victoria.¹⁴ Upon learning of his royal invitation, the story goes, he fainted.

"So that the people will see only Thee"

Roland Hayes barnstormed through France, Czechoslovakia, and then in 1924, Germany, where: "There was fear among the German population that the Africans and their Afro-German children would lead to the (desecration) of the German race."¹⁵

Perhaps it was faithful optimism that led Hayes to advertise his Berlin concert with a six-inch headshot in the local papers, announcing that he would sing Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Strauss—the German masters. Immediately, letters to the editor complained that Hayes should not attempt German art songs but rather sing jazz or "the cotton songs of Georgia."

The night of the packed Berlin concert, Hayes and his pianist walked onto the stage in total darkness. When the spotlight hit them, the audience, which included future Nazis, began to hiss and boo. For ten minutes, Hayes stood still, eyes closed, drawing on the power of freedom in Christ. God had spared him to sing, and sing he would. He said that, standing there, he repeated this prayer: "God blot out Roland Hayes so that the people will see only Thee." As the hostile crowd wore itself out and the hissing subsided, Hayes gave a slight nod. Then the music began¹⁶ for Schubert's "Du bist die Ruh'." He sang from his soul, and the Spirit did her work. The song ended. "Still stunned...the audience was jolted back into reality by the sound of a lone sustained clap..."¹⁷ Then, another. The applause crescendoed into cheering, "Roland, Roland, Roland!"

"Let the little boy be..."

Although he was barred from livelihood in the United States, Hayes returned home with a lot of money. He returned to Gordon County and purchased the farm where his mother had been enslaved, and he gave it

¹³ "Vesti la giubba" from *I Pagliacci*, 1919 <<https://youtu.be/aF6udumNd9k>>

¹⁴ <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/roland-hayes>>

¹⁵ Christopher Antonio Brooks, *Roland Hayes: The Legacy of an American Tenor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 120.

¹⁶ "Du bist die Ruh" Roland Hayes <<https://youtu.be/8Sibe38cQPQ>>

¹⁷ Christopher Antonio Brooks, *Roland Hayes: The Legacy of an American Tenor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015)

to her. The Hayes Family allowed the former slaveholder family to live on the property, rent free. Amazing grace, that sings from soul to soul. I am because we are. I am free in order to free other people. Stand firm, American Christian, and, no matter its disguise, may no one submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Based on Luke 2, verse 41-50, now hear "Lit'l Boy, How Old Are You?" Roland Hayes' original composition in the Spiritual style, about a young brown man who had a mission to free all people from willful ignorance.

*Little boy, how old are you?
Little boy, how old are you?
Little boy, how old are you?
Sir, I'm only twelve years old.*

This little boy had them remember
He was born on 25th of December
Lawyers and doctors were amazed
And had to give the Little Boy praise.
Little Boy...

Lawyers and doctors stood in wonder
As though they had been struck by thunder
They decided as they wondered
That all mankind must come under
Little Boy...

This Little Boy had the key
To all the hidden mysteries
The lawyers decided, as wise as He,
They'd better let that Little Boy be.
Little Boy...

The last time the Little Boy was seen
He was standing on Mount Olive green
When He dispersed of the crowd
He entered up into a cloud.
Little Boy...