



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

LESSON 48

MEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR JUSTICE

You may summarize the stories in order to tell about all three men in one lesson, choose just one man's story to tell, tell each one over three successive weeks, or decide on some other combination that works for your setting.

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Over the years, the Episcopal Church has designated a number of men and women to be specially commemorated in the Church calendar. Many of these people are individuals whom the whole Church regards as "saints." Some of these people were martyrs, but many lived without persecution. Some are universally known, but some are known only in the Anglican Communion, and many are barely known to most people in the Church. Some were devout, all were faithful Christians, but none were perfect. All were models of the faith.

We call these saints *Easter people* because they lived and preached the Easter message of Christ's saving death and resurrection. "Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?" we are asked in our Baptismal Covenant. The men we hear about in today's lessons—Absalom Jones, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jonathan Myrick Daniels—fulfilled this promise to the end. Thus they proclaimed in their lives the Good News of God in Christ. Look for these special qualities in the lives of the people that we are studying today:

Absalom Jones:

- courage
- reconciling love
- freedom for God's people.

Martin Luther King Jr.:

- prophetic voice
- love
- liberty
- mercy
- singleness of heart

Jonathan Myrick Daniels:

- faithful witness
- sacrificial love

WHEN THE CHURCH CELEBRATES THEIR MINISTRY

February 13: Absalom Jones, priest (died 1818)

April 4 or January 15: Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights leader and prophet (died 1968). April commemorates his death, the date that the church traditionally uses for commemoration. January is the national holiday that commemorates his birth.

August 14: Jonathan Myrick Daniels, seminarian and witness for civil rights (died 1965)

In the book *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, now published as *Holy Women, Holy Men* (NY: Church Publishing, 2010), you can find a short biographies and scripture readings, arranged by date, for these saints. The suggested Bible readings during this lesson's Prayer time are those included in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* or *Holy Women, Holy Men*.



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

The lives of these three men—Absalom, Martin and Jonathan—cover a wide span of time. The

struggle to gain freedom and justice for African-Americans has been a very long struggle, which continues to this day.

Absalom's journey from being a house slave to being the "Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church" begins early on, when he buys the freedom of his wife before he buys his own freedom. The power of his integrity, as he struggles to affirm the dignity of the African-American people in his diocese, affects everyone with whom he works. He leads his flock with such compassion mixed with righteousness that he lifts up the whole city. When God's justice and compassion are practiced, all of the children of God are raised up.

Jonathan was but a young seminarian when he lost his life to protect a girl from an angry man with a gun during the civil rights conflicts in the South. From his journals we learn of his profound commitment to furthering the reign of God by working to bring God's justice to society. At the end, he followed the example of his Lord, who told his disciples at their last supper together, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Martin also laid down his life for his friends. And he counted the whole world as his friends, even when they vilified and hated him for his work towards a world of righteousness and justice for all people. Martin's unrelenting insistence on peaceful means and nonviolence to combat evil makes him a true prophetic voice in this world of violence. His speeches, sermons and writings are full of passion for the truth of God's reign, tinged with sorrow for those who cannot see that truth. They are full of

reproach for those who refuse to follow the truth. And they are full of compassion for all of us for whom the reign of God and the Good News of Christ are so distant. His words of love combined with his insistence on justice are words that all of us should heed. And his dedication to living out his deep faith is a dedication that inspires us all.



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

Absalom initially was a member of the Episcopal Church, but he left when it rejected his people. Happily, we have mostly learned from his example, and we honor him, sometimes with special services on or near his feast day.

Jonathan was an Episcopal seminarian, but his witness is non-denominational. Still, we see in him the Anglican commitment to social justice.

Martin was Baptist, but he was a prophet for all of us, and his words call out the prophetic voice that Episcopalians commit to when we make our vows in our Baptismal Covenant.

In the Episcopal Church, we regard these men as *saints* not because they performed any miracles or lived perfect lives without sin. We call them *saints* because of their fidelity to Jesus Christ and their lives of devotion to following his example. We call them *saints* because they are examples for us, not of earthly perfection, but of ordinary people living extraordinary lives dedicated to Christ. They all have special qualities that can teach us how we too can be faithful Christians, following in his footsteps as they did.

The Episcopal Church, in its triennial General Convention, makes changes to the Church calendar, as more individuals are recognized as holy people for us. The calendar on pages 19-30 of the *Book of Common Prayer* lists, by date, the names of people who are commemorated as of the printing of the 1979 Prayer Book. Since then, many more people

have been added. The companion book *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* is a resource for the special days to be observed in the Church, including the various “saints” as designated by the Episcopal Church. It was updated every three years to reflect the triennial changes made by General Convention, and in its last reprinting in 2010, its title was changed to *Holy Women, Holy Men*. The information in these books is arranged by date—usually the date of their death, not their birth. For each person or persons commemorated there is a special prayer, scripture readings and a brief biography.

Where Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer are offered daily in a church, these saints are often remembered on their day of commemoration. The officiant or celebrant will use the opening collect and the readings for the day’s worship. Often a brief homily will offer thoughts on why this person is important to us and what we can learn from her or him.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each

other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- taper candle or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer.

Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting that reading in the meeting room.)

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer:

- Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

—*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 823

Or use any prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* or from any book of prayers, or make one up yourself.

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the scene:

- Click onto <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V57lotnKGF8> to hear about 1.5 minutes of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.
- Explain to the group that they will have a chance to hear the entire speech later on.
- If you prefer, you can also find the speech in its entirety on YouTube®.

Stories about today’s saints are printed on pages 6-8 at the end of the lesson for you to use for storytelling. If you know additional interesting

stories about today’s saints, share them with the group.

There are several biographies of Martin Luther King, Jr. for youth, including a book of his famous “I Have a Dream” speech itself, with powerful and wonderful pictures by various artists illustrating the speech (*I Have a Dream* by Martin Luther King Jr., foreword by Coretta Scott King, NY: Scholastic Press, 2007). Other books include many of his sermons and speeches; still others include audio CD’s so you can listen to Dr. King delivering his inspirational speeches.

Let the youth hear the story without analyzing it for them or discussing it. For now, simply let the story sink into their minds and hearts.



ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.

Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today’s story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day’s lesson.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-6 in the Appendix (also downloadable) where we’ve

provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities (craft recipes, music, drama) that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

Note: The activities for lessons 36-48 have been slightly modified to include an optional, ongoing project for your group, a project we call the *Saints and Easter-People Project*.

- On a weekly basis, group members will listen to the stories of the saints and will glean important and interesting facts about them. By doing some additional research on the person—either at home or during meeting time—participants will locate such things as pictures, quotes, dates of birth, accomplishments and even representative symbols of each person studied. By the end of the project, they will have compiled a book to be published in hard copy or online that will serve as a reference for the entire congregation, a teaching tool for all ages, and a fascinating addition to the church’s personal library.
- If your group decides to take on the project, we’ve provided a template for your use, *included in your download of WGP for Youth, Year 2*.
- The template is in PowerPoint, thus making it easier to manipulate and later print out or share online, either by e-mail or on your church’s website.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK’S SESSION



WEAVING THE FAMILY OF GOD

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*

- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As a prompt, you might ask:

- Can you think of examples of people who still suffer from discrimination and oppression today?
- What characteristics did these three men share?
- What else needs to be done to fulfill Dr. King's dream?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered—in the participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service

or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- God of love and compassion, we thank you for the courage and compassion of Absalom, Martin and Jonathan and for the difference they made in others' lives. We pray that you will watch over all those who work to right the burdens of oppression and prejudice that they may live in safety and freedom. Grant us the courage of our convictions, the security of our faith, and the knowledge of your love. All this we ask in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

End with a dismissal used in church, such as:

- Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The group responds:

- Thanks be to God!



SUGGESTED HYMNS

- "Blessed Absalom," #44, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "Blessed Martin, Pastor, Prophet," #46, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "We Shall Overcome," #227, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "Keep the Dream Alive," #229, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "We Are Marching in the Light of God," #787 *Wonder, Love, and Praise* (NY: Church Publishing, 1997)



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

THE STORIES OF THREE MEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM

Today we are going to hear about three men who dedicated their lives to making the United States a more just and free country for everyone. They used the power of love, compassion, mercy and the rightness of their cause as the way to make changes.

These men were also important in our Church. Sometimes we call such people *saints*. We might also call them *Easter People*. In our church, a saint is somebody who loves God and who tried to do what God asked. Some of these people are famous, and you may already know their names—St. Patrick, St. Nicholas, for example. But many saints are not famous at all. They didn't do anything amazing that the whole world knows about; they simply did God's work. There may be saints like that whom you know—people like your grandmother who cared for her children when they were sick, your uncle who quietly gave his life savings to his church, or the stranger on the street who smiles and listens to homeless people and gives them hope and friendship. Saints are regular people like us who do God's work. For the next few weeks in church school we will be hearing about some of the saints our Church wants us to know about.

Note: You may summarize the stories to tell about all three men in one lesson, choose just one man's story to tell, tell each one over three successive weeks or some other combination that works for your setting.

The Story of Absalom Jones

In 1746, more than 250 years ago, Absalom Jones was born a house slave in Delaware. He taught himself how to read the New Testament and other books. When he was 16 years old, he was sold to a storeowner, who

let him go to a night school for African-Americans. When he was 20, he got married to another slave, then bought her freedom with the money he had been earning at the store. When he was 38, he bought his own freedom.

Absalom went to church, to St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. When he was there, he served as a lay minister for its black members. At that time, in this church, the black and white members worshiped together, sharing the same space, but the two groups did not interact as equal partners. That is why Absalom served the black members, and a white minister served the white members. Initially, there were only a few African-American members. But under Absalom's care, the black membership grew larger and church leaders decided to segregate the people. So one day without warning, during the Sunday worship service, the ushers directed the black worshipers to move from their regular pews where they were sitting to a separate space upstairs all by themselves. Indignantly, the blacks got up in a group and walked out of the church.

These African-American Christians, under Absalom's leadership, soon built a church. They called it the African Church, and it was located in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania. Eventually he was ordained a deacon, then a priest. Absalom was a good preacher, who spoke often against slavery. He was beloved by his people because he was so kind and gentle, and he visited them often to take care of them. He became known as "the Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church."



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

THE STORIES OF THREE MEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM (CONT.)

The Story of Jonathan Daniels

Jonathan Daniels was born almost 200 years later than Absalom, in 1939, but he lived and died for the same thing: dignity for the African-American people.

When Jonathan was young, he could not decide what he wanted to do. Maybe he wanted to practice medicine, be an ordained priest, be a lawyer and write books. But one day, when he was in church, he had a powerful meeting with God, and his faith became strong. He decided to become a priest.

When Jonathan was 26 years old, he heard Martin Luther King Jr. ask everyone to come to Selma, Alabama, to help all people gain the right to vote. At that time in the United States, African-American people often were prevented from voting. So Jonathan went to his school and asked to be able to work in Selma for a while. Before he left, he went to Evening Prayer at church and heard the "Song of Mary" sung: "He hath put down the mighty..."

Hearing these words, he became very sure that what he was about to do would be the right thing.

For us today it might be hard to imagine that working for voting rights for everyone was dangerous work, but it was. One hot day, August 14, 1965, Jonathan was part of a picket line for voting rights, and he, along with many other people, was put in jail. But then, suddenly, they were let out of jail. As they left, they knew they were in great danger. There were many people who hated what Jonathan and his companions were doing.

Four of them walked to a small store and began walking up the steps of the store entrance. When Ruby Sales, a 16-year-old girl, got to the top step, a man with a gun suddenly appeared and began to curse her. Jonathan quickly pulled her to one side to shield her from those awful threats. Just as he did this, the man opened fire with his gun, and Jonathan was hit. The gunshot wound killed him, but Ruby was saved.

Today we remember Jonathan as a martyr for Christ.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

THE STORIES OF THREE MEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM (CONT.)

The Story of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the pastor of an ordinary Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama.

One day in 1955 a woman named Rosa Parks refused to ride in the back of the city bus, as all African-Americans were “supposed to do.” Her brave act became the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott, as thousands of African-Americans joined her in refusing to ride the buses until black people could be seated with dignity, wherever they wished. Martin became the leader of this boycott, and suddenly the whole nation knew who he was.

Martin then started a group that would lead peaceful, nonviolent rallies for justice and freedom for all people, especially African-Americans. Martin always insisted that there never, ever be any violence used against those who opposed them, even when those opponents used violence against Martin’s people. The forces that wanted to keep the blacks down used sticks, guns, tear gas, fire hoses and dogs, but Martin and his people had only the power of truth and love.

Eventually, the government began to see that his cause was right, and Martin’s work was thus very important in passing the country’s Civil Rights Acts of the 1960’s.

Martin was always in great danger. Many people were very angry at what he was trying to do for African-Americans, to make everyone free and equal. His home was bombed once. He was stabbed almost to death and received many death threats. He was put in jail 30 times by the government. But he had deep faith in God and the work God called him to do.

Late one night, Martin received a really vicious death threat on the telephone. Alone in his kitchen, he cried and prayed to God. Then he heard the Lord saying, “Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice.” And God promised never to leave Martin alone. “No, never alone.” This late-night meeting with God reminded him of Jesus’ Transfiguration on the mountaintop, so Martin called this night his “Mountaintop Experience.”

One evening in Memphis, Tennessee, Martin stepped outside his hotel room onto the balcony. Someone shot him then, killing him. He was only 39 years old. The whole country mourned him greatly, for he truly was a prophet of this country, calling us to love, justice and dignity for every human being.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

EXAMINING PREJUDICE: TWO MOVIES AND A BOOK

Group members have the opportunity to view two movies and read a book, all of which shed light on prejudice in its many permutations.

Note: Feel free to watch both movies and read the book, *or* just pick one. All three provide excellent examples of the dangers of prejudice and discrimination.

Materials:

- DVD of *Remember the Titans* (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2002)
- DVD of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 1962)
- copy of *The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss (NY: Random House Children's Books, 1984)
- DVD player and monitor *or* computer to download movie (for small groups)

Directions:

The movies are best if watched in their entirety, so plan on extra time to show one.

Remember the Titans

- As group members watch this movie, ask them to look for many different examples of discrimination and prejudice, not just racial prejudice.

To Kill a Mockingbird

- An excellent film for adolescents, this film will undoubtedly raise the ire of the youth; the blatant unfairness of Tom Robinson's situation will likely leave them angry and frustrated.
- However, there are notes of progress and hope in this classic film; ask participants to watch for them.

The Butter Battle Book

- This book tells the story of the war that comes about as a result of two groups of people who choose to butter their bread on different sides!
- The book, by Dr. Seuss, was written as a children's book but is appropriate—and important—for people of all ages.
- Ask for volunteers to read one or two pages at a time.
- As the story is read, the foolishness and the pointlessness of the battle becomes clear and will, no doubt, provoke quite a discussion among group members.

Note: Make certain you have permission to view films in a church setting. To show films in a church setting, you must have a Church Video License. Visit <http://www.cvli.com>.



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

INCLUSIVE VS. EXCLUSIVE

Group members discuss the meanings of the words *inclusive* and *exclusive*. In addition, they shine the light on examples of each in their schools, church and hometowns.

Directions:

1. Before beginning this discussion, review the rules for discussion with the group:
 - People speak one at a time
 - Questions, comments and opinions are allowed and encouraged
 - Hurtful or derogatory comments are not allowed
 - Everyone is entitled to his/her opinion, even if they differ for those of others
 - Listen, think and respect
2. Ask group members to define the words *inclusive* and *exclusive*.
3. Discuss:
 - Can you think of types of organizations, club or groups that are considered *exclusive*?
 - What is the Episcopal Church's stand on including people in worship?
 - What kind of a club would they rather belong to: inclusive or exclusive? Why?
 - What kind of environment is present in your school? Is it welcoming? off-putting? cliquy?
 - How is our church doing with making people feel welcome?
 - How is our community doing with making people feel welcome? Is it a place where everybody knows everybody and it's hard to be a newcomer? Or, are people new to our town/city made to feel welcome and treated as valuable parts of society?
 - Finally, what progress has been made in moving toward becoming more inclusive as a society? What still needs to be done?



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

SEARCH FOR THE SAINTS

Group members will find the names (some first, some last) of all the saints studied this year. In addition, they will find a secret message for the saints.

Materials:

copies of the *Search for the Saints* wordsearch (p. 12), 1 per participant

pens or pencils

optional: CD player and CD of “When the Saints Come Marching In” to play while the group works

optional: refreshments, paper cups and napkins

Preparation:

Make enough copies of the wordsearch for everyone in the group (plus a few extra)

Directions:

1. Distribute the *Search for the Saints* wordsearch.
2. Explain that there is a secret message hidden in the puzzle. It will be found by copying down the unused letters, starting at the top left corner and reading from left to right until the message is complete.

Answer Key:

The hidden message is: *God bless the saints and their hard work and sacrifice.*

SEARCH FOR THE SAINTS

Search for and circle the names listed below. Names can run up, down, forward, backward and diagonally.

Once you've found all the names, transfer the *unused* letters—starting in the upper left corner of the puzzle—into the blanks provided. When all the blanks are filled, read the hidden message.

E G N O T D D P B E R I D L E Y
 L N E A I U A S C S S T H E T S
 E A I G H T B N S D C I N T R S
 A L I R R T A M R T H E M N U F
 D R I I E T A A A C E A R T T R
 B N C Z S H G N H N R P E A H A
 A K I N A E T I O G E A H R L N
 N B O C D B H A A J S S N E A C
 A C S L H R E R C S C T T M N I
 I D I A W O E T R E H A Y O E S
 L H R K L T L E H N E N N A N R
 U K I N G O M A D G W T D S A C
 J R I F I O M C S A S O A E Y K
 A M B R O S E A T K K N L S I E
 I S G L A T I M E R Y R E T E P
 W Y B M A R T I N E W T O N B V

- | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| ABSALOM | AGNES | AMBROSE | BLOOMER | BRIGID |
| CATHERINE | CLARE | CONSTANCE | CRANMER | ELIZABETH |
| FRANCIS | HILDEGARD | JONATHAN | JULIAN | KING |
| LATIMER | MARGARET | MARTIN | NEWTON | NICHOLAS |
| PATRICK | PETER | RIDLEY | SCHERESCHEWSKY | STANTON |
| STEPHEN | TRUTH | TUBMAN | TYNDALE | |

Hidden Message:
