

Reflection

Dedication of Headstones: London and Sally

City Cemetery

May 4, 2017

About three years ago a few of us from St. Ann's Church where I serve as priest met weekly to read the book "The Help." There was a rich honesty about our conversations. One thing that fascinated me were the personal stories they shared about their own families having African-Americans serve as domestics: maids, cooks and nannies in their home growing up white and Southern as children and young adults in the 1950's and 1960's. And they added that their families were not affluent by any means.

Yet as we sat together I noticed something else. They remembered these black folks who cooked, cared for and carried their loads with fondness in a world that they described as being "just how things were back then."

We sat in the living room of this east Nashville home where they admitted changing in their understanding about race and race relations. Some went away to college and graduate school where they were introduced to a larger and diverse world. Others somehow "got religion" and took up the cause for racial justice or at least taught their children differently. Others claimed that in their inner soul they never felt quite right about the South they grew up in when it came to race relations. They valued and were thankful for their families and how they were raised and cared for. And yet they came to realize and appreciate those whose skin color was different and confronted their own struggle against the sin of racism.

I was deeply moved by the honesty and trust of my white brothers and sisters in Christ. I was thankful for their individual journeys and transformations as I sat among them as their priest – a man who is African - American.

The days of London and Sally and countless other Black folks living in slavery were harsh and morally wrong. Yet today we read about numerous occasions of recognition and even repentance regarding institutional involvement in slavery and its inhuman treatment of Black people. In Washington, D.C. the leader of the Catholic Order of Jesuits that founded Georgetown University, asked for forgiveness from the descendants of slaves whose sale helped the school financially.

On June 7th, a memorial plaque will be dedicated near Fisk University on the front lawn of St. Anselm's Episcopal Church in north Nashville. It will have the names of three black men lynched in Davidson County in the 19th century. The inscription on the plaque includes the words from a proverb- "Good men (people) must die. But death cannot kill their names."

Now we gather in a spirit of grace and deference to dedicate the headstones of London and Sally the faithful slaves of Joseph and Adelia Acklen.

What is important about today's dedication is not just the headstones. What is important is remembering. We remember the precious nature of the lives of London and Sally and all

human life given by God; the value of family; and the part they played in the history of this community.

Though we cannot remember their personal stories we can hold London, Sally and others buried here with reverence and respect.

We recall today the names of London and Sally inscribed on these beautiful headstones. And we give God all glory and honor with rejoicing. For their names, as scripture tells us, are also written in heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Luke 10:20)

Rev. Rick Britton