

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper

Sunday, February 28, 2021

Second Sunday in Lent



"God Appears and Calls Us to Liberate Who from What?"

Second of six in a series during Lent entitled

"Biblical Optometry: Discerning our Church's 'Corrective Vision'"

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-12



 WindhamWorld
Affairs Council
Creating Dialogue On
International Matters
Presents

A New Pattern for Democracy: Lessons from
South Africa's Nobel Peace Prize-Winner Albert Luthuli
with author The Reverend Scott Couper
and respondent Ayanda Ngobho joining from Durban South Africa

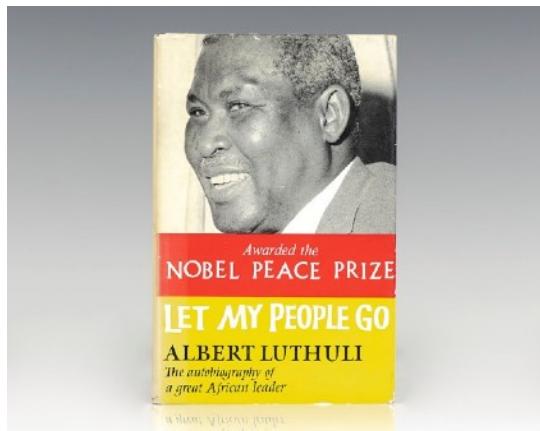
Sunday, February 21, 2021 at 4:00 pm via Zoom
Pre-register at WindhamWorldAffairsCouncil.org 

 WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCILS OF AMERICA

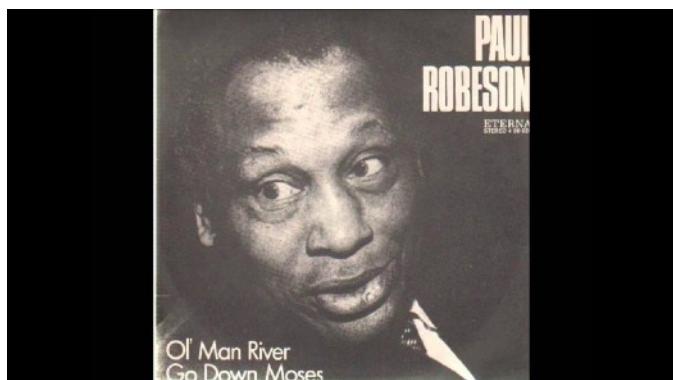
I am not sure how many of you were able to tune-in to my lecture on

Albert Luthuli, the 1960 Nobel Peace Prize-winner, for the Windham World Affairs Council last Sunday. In a footnote, I cited Luthuli's autobiography,

published in 1962. Albert Luthuli fought against white supremacy in South Africa. In return, the Apartheid regime ‘banned’, or ‘blacklisted’ him.



Luthuli’s autobiography is entitled “Let My People Go”. One need not be a biblical scholar to recall that Luthuli took this title from the refrain that Moses repeated to Pharaoh many times over: “Let My People Go”.

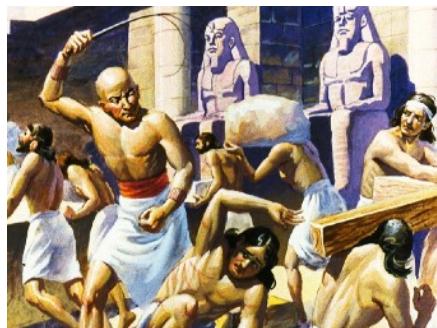


I would like to pause now and listen to the African-American spiritual “Let My People Go” (2:06). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3OjHIhLCDs>

How many of you know about Paul Robeson, the singer who sang that famous rendition of “Let My People Go”? I chose Robeson’s version because in addition to being a famous singer he was an equally famous political activist. Robeson was quite vocal in the United States’ Civil Rights Movement and the

government blacklisted him for his political beliefs during the McCarthy era.¹

Luthuli was also blacklisted. Moses too. So was Jesus.



Moses killed an Egyptian overseer for abusing a Hebrew slave. That violation ended-up being quite political. Pharaoh pretty much ‘blacklisted’ Moses. Moses fled into exile. Moses’ response to the call of God from the burning bush to free the Hebrews from slavery was also political, but on a far grander scale.

The ‘powers and principalities’ far more than blacklisted Jesus. He was crucified for his persistent call and fight for justice.



Jesus articulated his God-given vision when he said: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the

¹ Paul Robeson, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Robeson, accessed February 27, 2021.

foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [...] ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the **least of these** my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:31-46). A portion of Lord’s Prayer fuels my desire to minister in partnership with all of you: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth *just as it is* in heaven”. Jesus’ prayer that justice be present on Earth, just as it is in heaven, is as much a political prayer as it is a spiritual one – if the two can even be distinguished.

My point with Moses, Robeson, Luthuli, and with Jesus is that most callings from God are political. And if they are not political, then they have political implications. Moses’ imperative to Pharaoh to “Let My People Go” was inherently political – to its core.

VISION

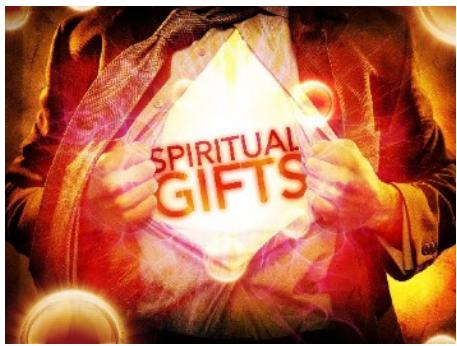
What will it mean for our church to have a gospel vision? I would like to propose to you this morning that our church’s vision be sourced from what we perceive to be the gifts with which the Holy Spirit has blessed our church. Our church’s vision ought to be inspired by what this church is ‘good at’, what we are passionate about, and what we are uniquely situated to engender. If God

has given us gifts, then those gifts ought to be shared with others. So, as a people of faith we must look around us and see who, with us, needs liberating from what in our church and in our community.

When Jesus spoke about the state of our souls, he spoke about what is commonly referred to as ‘salvation’. Now when Jesus spoke about state of our physical bodies, I believe he spoke of what is often referred to as ‘liberation’. Moses’ God-given vision was for Pharaoh to let God’s people go. That’s liberation!



Friends, as we envision our church’s future, let’s see Moses as an example. Moses was uniquely situated to speak to and challenge Pharaoh having been his son. What is our church’s unique situation? I believe it is location. It’s in our name! Our commodious building and yard are in the ‘Centre’. That suggests to me is that we ought to perceive our vision to be visible, seen, outspoken, accessible, present, and imbricated in our community.



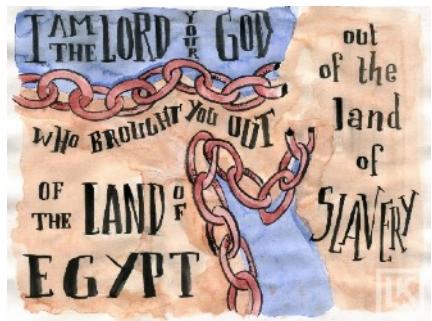
Moses had spiritual gifts that led him to be in-tune with God and obedient. What are our unique spiritual gifts as a faith community? I would suggest that our church is blessed with 'maturity' – and by that I mean that with age come the spiritual gifts of wisdom and experience. Our collective wisdom and experience lead our church to be uniquely capable to assist our community in matters of education and health.

Moses had a weakness and that weakness was a stutter or bad lisp. He did not speak particularly well. Moses' speech impediment concerned him deeply; he felt underqualified, inadequate.



During this season of Lent, I believe we all need to repent for our feelings of inadequacy. For example, many of us feel we just can't handle technology. So, we often throw-up our hands and give-up. Well, if we do that we will doom our church. Many of us feel we don't have the leadership skills. Rubbish. We all

can lead. This Lent, as we discern our vision, let us repent of underestimating ourselves!



Moses identified the ‘who’ that needs liberating: the Hebrews. Moses identified the liberation from ‘what’: slavery. So, who is God calling us to liberate, and from what? Poverty? Sickness? Depression? Racism? Deportation? Substance abuse? Homophobia? Hunger? Lack of Education? Or, rather than ‘who’ needs to be liberated, should we be asking ‘what’ needs to be liberated? The atmosphere? Plants? Animals? The Earth itself?

This is the word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.