**Guest Preacher: Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II**

**Sermon Title: “Have You Read the Mortgage?”**

**Biblical Passage: Matthew 21:12-16**

**Passage Background and Summary**

The scripture for today depicts Jesus’s actions in the Temple. Jesus enters the Temple, drives out those who are buying and selling, and turns over tables. He does so because the Temple has become an exclusive place that is more in alignment with the empire. In this scripture, Jesus exclaims that “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Afterwards, he begins to welcome the marginalized and all people into the space. When they saw what he was doing, the young people cried out in praise, and the priests and scribes were angered.

**Sermon Points**

One of the things churches go through is building sanctuaries, obtaining mortgages, and paying them off. Given the scripture for today, Rev. Dr. Barber reflects on attempts to keep some in and others out. This is evident in the slave codes, the Civil War, and many events throughout history that have worked to ensure the poor black and white people never organize together for social justice. These events called into question, who would be in and out of this house called America. Dr. King addresses this in one of his public sermons in which he discusses the ways the southern aristocracy worked to give the poor white man Jim Crow and keep everyone divided. Thus, the struggle for voting rights was also about overcoming efforts to keep black people and white people from uniting. Furthermore, voting rights, economic justice, and more are Biblical issues. Suppressing these rights suggest I’m not a person created by God and the *imago dei* is not in me.

Now, we must consider this idea of mortgage. For the United States the mortgage includes the Preamble, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Fifteenth Amendment. Many leaders either haven’t read it or intentionally ignore it. Amid this, Ebenezer was born into a period of racism. This church was called to be an Ebenezer in the Jim Crow South and a place that would take seriously the words of Jesus in saying my house will be a house of prayer for all people. Ebenezer is a testimony to the commitment of God and a stone of hope.

The mortgage of the Bible says this is God’s house. According to the mortgage in God’s house, those treated like outsiders have to be given special attention. The church must have a distinct witness in the world. For us, it’s about the mortgage and what we’ve been taught in the house. Any policy that works to exclude must be faced with love, truth, and a clear critique by the church. Faith is a commitment to the way of the Spirit. The church is instructed by its mortgage to stand and declare the better way of love and justice. The church is a social strategy. The church must call out anything that goes against God’s way of love and against the Church’s mortgage whether striking down Asian women, limiting healthcare, trying to suppress the right to vote, etc. God’s way is everybody in and nobody out. Do you really know what is in the Bible and what the mortgage says?

Jesus knew he would be a marked man for daring to separate the religious from the empire. He knew he would be headed to Calvary. Jesus challenged the use of the Temple, and they were mad because they wanted to keep it exclusive. Jesus turned things over and declared it as a house of prayer for all people. What if all we need to see healing is to declare my house shall be a house of prayer for all people. This was even attractive to the young people. All they had to do was be relevant, be caring and loving and welcoming. It all came about because of the “all theology”. We have to understand the power of this “all theology”. All are welcome. All can come in. All are loved. All are embraced. All are important. We can put it all in God’s hands.

Reflection Questions

1. What mortgages do you live by? What are the values communicated by those mortgages?
2. What are some other examples and events that have created division in American history?
3. What is the continued role of the Church and Ebenezer specifically in upholding America to its mortgage?
4. What does it look like for the Church to be led by the mortgage that is the Bible? How do we live that out in the Church and in the broader community?
5. How do you interpret the power of “all theology?”