



"From Where I Sit ..."

"Living 'Through' Extraordinary Times"

When I was a boy growing up in L.A. (Lower Alabama) I loved going to school and I especially enjoyed my classes in Math, Science and Business. What I didn't like was History! It seemed old and stale - all of those crucial dates, momentous events and people who did important things, yet somehow the significance of these things did not seem quite so important when viewed over the long expanse of history. At that time I didn't understand that history was more than just some record of past accomplishments or the notation of chronicled occurrences limited to the pages of a book that sat on a shelf. I didn't understand that history was a living thing that I had misunderstood because I had restricted its relevance and purpose only to a time in the past. Over time I have learned that I was wrong, very wrong.

Events have occurred during my life that history has recorded as important, but at the time I did not realize their full significance. I remember the election of a President that created for America a "Camelot" experience. I remember the civil rights demonstrations across the country and freedom marches led by Dr. King and others. I remember Sputnik, the first man in space and the first man to walk on the Moon. I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis and how close the world came to nuclear annihilation. I remember a president from the South who signed into law a Civil Rights Act and a Voting Rights Act. I remember the deaths of Medgar Evers, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy and Malcom X. I remember the riots of 1970 and the Kent State Killings. I remember Watergate and the resignation of a President. I remember the release of the hostages from the middle-east and how the timing of that release impacted the election of a president. I remember the energy crisis, long gas lines and when interest rates were nearly 20%. I remember Desert Shield and Desert Storm. I remember the impeachment of another president and the early signs of a divided Congress. I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when the Twin Towers were attacked. I remember the war in Iraq, the death of Saddam Hussein and the continuing war in Afghanistan. I especially remember the election of a black president, the birth of the Tea Party, the passage of the Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act, the assault on our present day civil rights, the debt ceiling crisis of 2011 and now the closing of the US government. And these are just a few of the significant events I remember.

As I reflect on these memories, what is most evident to me is the recognition that my knowledge of these events did not come from some dusty history book; what is evident is that I have lived through these events, that I have lived through this recording of history. But through all of these history making events, one thought has remained constant in my mind as a black man in present day America; the thought that no matter the many advances of the people of color, the people of African descent, we as a people are still not yet free. For more than 40 years I have reminded my contemporaries and instructed our youth not to rely on what I call "the appearance of equality" and the actions of a few well-meaning persons of non-African descent as a true representation of an America that guarantees "equal" equality to all of its citizens. It now appears that the history I didn't understand or appreciate as a child is now proving me right.

We are living in an extraordinary time! For five years we have lived under an administration led by this country's first African-American President. A time in which most reasonable and sensible thinking people expected as the realization of the promise foretold through the words of a latter day prophet named King who echoed the sentiments of a President named Lincoln.

At the writing of this article, our country, America, is teetering on the brink of default which economist and others predict will have a catastrophic impact on not just our country, but every major world economy. And what is it all about? It appears to be about a few people who have decided that even a US President of African descent in this 21st century is not going to be allowed to be free ...

What do I mean by this? In 1986, I moved to Beloit, Wisconsin to pastor the Wesley CME Church. Although a small membership, the congregation was well respected in the community. Because of that respect, I was elected the President of the Black Ministers Alliance and that January of 1987, I was invited to be the speaker for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ecumenical Worship Service for the entire community. My text was Ephesians 6:12 *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”* Although this was a familiar text, to make my intended message clear to all of the attendees, both Black and White, I used the subject *“Little Men in Back Rooms Pulling Strings!”* That was 1987 and I had no idea how closely I had labeled what would ultimately be exposed in the “backrooms” of Congress and America. From a promise in a backroom on Inauguration Eve to make the first Black President a one-term president to the backroom confession of the apparent unimportance of 49% of the populace.

Yes, we are living in an extraordinary time and it is important that we as a people, not just of color, but a people of God, recognize the importance and the significance of these current events and the living of these days. The madness that drives some people, in this enlightened age, to be willing to sacrifice almost everything of value to hold back a part of our country defies understanding ... until put in the context of the continued struggle for equality.

It is equally important that we as the Church, the called-out of God, not only recognize that we are living “in” an extraordinary time, but recognize that we are living “through” an extraordinary time. We cannot afford to be silent. Our voices must be heard. And to be true to our calling as Christians of the Black Methodist tradition, we must accurately see what is occurring around us and, for the sake of those we lead, put these events into the appropriate context, for only then can we fully appreciate where we are now and where we will be when we arrive on the other side of these “extraordinary times.”

When I was a child I did not appreciate history as I should have but today I am no longer that child. For as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “... when I became a man, I put away childish things.” I Cor. 13:11 (KJV) Today I understand even more than I did just last year or yesterday because it is clear to me that I am not just living “in” extraordinary times but living “through” extraordinary times! Or at least that is the way it looks to me ...

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