

Free all Captives

Exodus 34:30 “When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.”

Fifty five years ago two of our prominent leaders into independence, Sir Donald Sangster and Norman Manley, both attorneys at law, led a delegation to the United Kingdom to argue the case that Jamaica was ready to be an independent nation. Today marks fifty five years since those discussions. As we look back, and look forward, we must ask ourselves what have we achieved and what we plan to do to challenge ourselves as we move forward into another fifty five years? Fifty five years in the life of a nation is still very young, nevertheless, it serves as a watershed for such a nation to continue to set the foundation for what it wants to become. We can become a nation blazing a trail of greatness for what it means to be a people deeply grounded in self affirmation and ready to take on the challenges and opportunities of nationhood. Justin Gatlin’s prostration before Usain Bolt is iconic. True greatness lies not in posturing but in performance. As we reflect on this 55th anniversary of our independence I wish to challenge us to think about three things the writer of the book of Exodus highlights in their march to freedom as the people of Israel.

The way the theme for today frames the discourse for our reflections on fifty five years of independence is “**Free the Captives.**” In this sense the focus of freedom is on people and how they relate with each other. Here the assumption is that people are free by nature. Freedom means “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants.” Just as an individual has the capacity to act, speak and think independently so does a nation. Yet, there is no way to speak of independence without interdependence. In the same way individuals need family and community to remain independent so is the nation. Nations need people working together effectively in order to remain independent. Similarly, freedom for captives means liberation of individuals so that nations will choose to act, speak and think independently and interdependently.

Liberation is the **first** thing the writer of the book of Exodus challenges the people of Israel to think about as they crossed from bondage into freedom. The goal of this freedom of course was settlement in the land which God promised them.

Exodus literally means going out. For the people of Israel it was going out from slavery in Egypt into freedom in the promised land of Canaan. In terms of independence this means acting and speaking out against oppression. It is a commitment to break the shackles of oppression of any kind and acting and

speaking in ways that not only advances personal but also the national cause of freedom.

It is with this sense of freedom in mind that our first National Hero, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, says that liberation is a journey in self-confidence. He says, "Be confident in your approach, and you would have won before you started. God and nature first made us what we are, and then out of our own genius we make ourselves what we want to be." For the writer of the book of Exodus confidence in liberation is to be found in the glow on the face of Moses. Moses represents the nature of liberation as a personal commitment to transformation. Moses knew ultimate transformation is based on the acceptance of a relationship with God. At the same time this transformation must be translated to activities that will transform the real experiences of the people of Israel. How is this transformation possible?

It is here that we come to the second thing about coming out from slavery into freedom and it is **the rule of law**. The writer of the book of Exodus challenges the people of Israel to think order as a basis on which to move towards settlement in the land which God promised to them. As an independent people they are to see the rule of law, especially as enshrined in the Ten Commandments, as providing

the standard for acting, speaking and thinking about freedom for all Israelites. Life in Israel is not a free for all; neither is it freedom for some and not for others. The rule of law is an opportunity to always act in obedience to God and in obedience to those in authority. This submission to the rule of law is by no means blind obedience, in that there can be no challenge to the legal system, on the contrary, obedience is the recognition that the greater good of any nation must always take priority over the good of individuals and interests groups. The rule of law is a guarantee that individualism will not triumph over the common good.

For the writer of the book of Exodus, coming out of bondage into freedom means paying keen attention to the rule of law. To this end he says, “Moses called to the people; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai” (Ex.34:31-32). Moses represents cohesiveness around the rule of law. The commandment is the rule of law and it is the basis on which the community is to maintain order and good governance as a nation state.

Finally, for the writer of the book of Exodus, **sound learning** is crucial as the Israelites move from bondage in slavery towards freedom and settlement in the

land which God promised them. At the heart of sound learning is listening. Here the writer says, “When Moses had finished speaking with them (the people), he put a veil on his face.” This means **sound learning** requires teaching as well as teachers. On the one hand, the teaching referred to here is the information citizens need to live meaningfully in the new society. Such teaching is to be based on building character, protecting the environment, pursuing peace and justice, developing people’s potential for greatness and advancing the common good. This teaching is summarized in the five marks of mission of the Anglican Communion. Teachers, on the other hand, are people who are committed to these ideals of the five marks of mission, and, like Moses are willing to model such characteristics of a people coming out of bondage into freedom.

The three elements of liberation, law and sound leaning are summed in in the following prayer:

Almighty God, who has given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech you that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of your favor and glad to do your will. Bless our land with honorable industry, **sound learning**, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our **liberties**, and fashion us into one united people. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in your Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to your **law**, we may show forth your praise among the nations of

the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in you to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the final analysis therefore independence can mean three things for us. It can mean **liberation**, embracing **the rule of law** and the pursuing **sound leaning**. Of these three it is the message of liberation that I will use to conclude this reflection.

Liberation, in the final analysis must mean the ability of each Jamaican to act, think and speak in ways that will advance the common good of all Jamaicans.

Mary Seacole epitomizes the nature of liberation that is desirable for all Jamaicans.

Seacole surmounted numerous odds and obstacles as she pursued her dream of nursing. At the heart of her mission of liberation was that of caring for others. As an independent and strong Jamaican woman Seacole acted, thought and spoke the language of liberation. The impact of her sense of liberation influenced those she cared for to the extent that when she had no money to return to the United Kingdom, from her work in Turkey, those she cared for, raised funds through a charity concert to enable her to return home. Here is a good example of a liberated woman showing independence and experiencing interdependence in return.

Like Seacole, we too need to embrace liberation as freeing all captives. No one should be in any doubt that mental slavery continues to hold us back collectively as a people. Yet, there is much reason for us to be hopeful. The number of children

attending primary and high schools, when compared to fifty five years ago, is simply phenomenal. Fifty five years ago less than fifty percent of Jamaican children were attending primary and high school. Fifty five years on the figure is closer to ninety percent. Much indeed has been achieved, however, we must aim to get to 100%. Every child must learn and every child can learn. Every child must there have access to a primary and secondary education if we are to seriously continue the journey towards the liberation of all Jamaicans.

To be effective, therefore, the journey towards liberation, or freedom for all Jamaicans, requires the rule of law and a commitment to sound learning. It is on the basis of sound learning that the Anglican Church stands proud of our achievement is education. Over 200 primary and high schools and a teacher's college, tell the story of our commitment to national development and the education of all Jamaicans. Our generation can commit to work and serve so that the next generation will receive a world class education that will continue to transform the social and economic conditions of Jamaica. With God's help we can do this as our part in the journey of liberation for all Jamaicans. We owe it to ourselves in this our fifty fifth year of independence. In the name...