

BUILD IN THE SPIRIT OF RICHARD ALLEN:

As we build on our glorious history we must do so using the principles and with the essential attitude that undergirded Richard Allen's life and ministry as our guide.

*For the purpose of this presentation the I will use excerpts from, Freedom's Prophet by Biography of Richard Allen written by Richard S. Newman to establish the historical context that shaped **Richard Allens's Faith, Ministry and the founding of the AME Church**

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION: Paul's Challenge to the Church

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For **no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.**

Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. -1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Points to Ponder:

1. The foundation of the church is unmovable and non-negotiable. -1 Corinthians 3:11

- The redemptive work of God in and through Jesus Christ
- *The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued and that Jesus was glad to die for me.* - Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age Skepticism*
 - we are in the business of transforming lives for the glory of God

2. There is flexibility and variety in the way that we can build. - 1 Corinthians 3:12

- We don't have to engage in carbon copy construction

3. How we build will be tested.- 1 Corinthians 3:13

- we must build with integrity
- we must with intentionality
- we must build with great care
- we must build to last

A workman who does not value the foundation will not care about the quality or longevity of the building and so will build with worthless materials.

- Bruce B. Barton and Grant R. Osborne

"...after David had done the will of God in his own generation, he died and was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed."- Acts 13:36

RICHARD ALLEN IN CONTEXT:

Allen's spiritual journey to Christianity and his secular journey to freedom occurred at a critical time in North America. Around him swirled the events of a revolutionary war, trans-Atlantic revivalism,

and the first antislavery movement in Western culture. Each of these broader forces swept down in some way to touch Allen's life.- **Richard S. Newman**

Points to Ponder:

- Allen did not live through these immense changes passively, a black man adrift in a sea of impersonal and malevolent forces. Rather, he shaped, and was in turn shaped by, the events swirling around him. - **Richard S. Newman**
- Richard Allen helped shape/frame the conversation regarding the major issues of his day.
- He was innovative. He used the tools available to him and created new ones
- He was in tune with and responsive to the felt needs of his time.
 - At the challenges us to do same. Some of due, and many of us do not, both laity and clergy.
- Allen understood his times
 - *From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.*
-1 Chronicles 12:35

RICHARD ALLEN WAS DEEPLY SPIRITUAL: How Richard Allen interprets his conversion experience is important because his ministry, life's work and by extension the ministry of the AME Church flowed out of that understanding.

Allen's autobiography trumpeted two birthdays: the one that put him on earth in 1760 and his rebirth, or conversion experience, as a teenager in 1777, "during which time I was awakened and brought to see myself poor, wretched and undone, and without the mercy of God must be lost." "One night I thought Hell would be my portion," he went on, and "I cried to the Lord both night and day... I cried unto him who delighted to hear the prayers of a poor sinner." Speaking figuratively, Allen then famously exclaimed, "all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and, glory to God, I cried."

Points to Ponder:

- Richard Allen was deeply spiritual. His relationship with God inform and shape his identity and work.
- His "why" in life was rooted in a revelation that he received about God that transformed his sense of self. What is our why on the local and connectional level.
- The message of the Gospel had a deep, transformative and lasting impact on Allen. It gave him...New Identity, New and higher purpose, Renewed Hope and personhood
- Like Allen people want to belong.

RICHAR ALLEN WAS A VISIONARY: Allens, ideas preceded bricks and mortar, for before Allen literally built his church in the 1790s he envisioned an autonomous black religious institution where none had previously existed. Allen once recalled that even local blacks doubted the efficacy of an

independent black church in Philadelphia, so fearful were they of a white backlash. But after segregated seating policies were instituted at white churches, Allen appeared to be a visionary, and many blacks soon joined his exodus from segregated Northern pews and galleries for independent black churches. - Richard S. Newman

Points to Ponder:

- We are good at remembering what was, but often fall short when it comes to envisioning what could be?
- Do we as a denomination still have the ability to see existence where there is non-existence?

RICHARD ALLEN DARED TO BE DIFFERENT: Allen's most important trait was his rigid determination, some would say obstinacy. Allen was stubborn in an era when many black people learned to dissemble, defer, and concede to white authority in order to survive. - **Richard S. Newman**

RICHARD ALLEN WAS EVANGELISTIC AND INCLUSIVE: Allen dreamed of traveling far and wide, of working where he wanted, of spreading the gospel to all who would receive it,

Points to Ponder:

- He was serious about advancing the Gospel
- So dedicated was Allen to the evangelical circuit that even while tracking cartloads of salt between Delaware and Pennsylvania during the Revolution—Allen made deliveries to American forces—he held “church” at the side of the road.
- (Allen’s dedication extended to “Indian natives,” among whom he spent nearly two months preaching.)
- What new frontiers of ministry are available to the AME Church.

A NOTE ABOUT THE APPEAL OF METHODISM: Besides Quakers, no group was more fervently antislavery than Methodists. Methodism “appealed to ambitious, intelligent, young African Americans,” historian Graham Hodges argues, because “many Methodist ministers were openly antislavery.”

- class meetings (with rigorous attention paid to biblical texts rather than ministers’ erudition),
 - camp revivals (where congregants visually displayed the power of God’s saving grace),
 - and expansive preaching circuits
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- For Methodists, the Lord was not some distant and angry figure but a palpable and healing presence in people’s lives. Anyone could alter his or her destiny, Methodists claimed, by embracing God through a conversion experience.

- Although American Methodism would eventually split into northern and southern branches during antebellum debates over slavery's sinfulness, in Allen's day Methodists were not shy about their antislavery commitments. The Methodist Church was out front on the major issue that day.
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Points to Ponder:

- What is our appeal today?
- Note that appeal of the Methodism to African-Americans in Allen's day was not a distant history, but how it spoke to and helped him rise above his present reality.
- How are we empowering the Young adults in our local churches and connection to run with what God has placed in their hearts to do.

A word about the milestones in Allen's life and ministry:

- In 1777 at the age of 17, Allen converted to Methodism, after hearing a white itinerant Methodist preacher rail against slavery. His owner, who had already sold Richard's mother and three of his siblings, also converted and eventually allowed Richard to purchase his freedom for \$2,000,
- In 1783 at the age of 23, he finally completed purchased of his freedom for \$2000.00
- In 1787 at the age of 27 Allen walked out St George Methodist church and with others Started the Free African Society.
- In 1794 at 34 he and others founded Bethel
- In 1799 at 39 he became the First African American to be ordained into the ministry of Methodist Episcopal Church
- In 1816 at the age of 56 with the help of others he established the first National Black Church in America

We Must Build in the Spirit of Richard Allen.

- **Allen's "why" was clear and compelling.**
 - it gave him a deep sense of belonging, justice, purpose and mission
- **Allen was innovative and Imaginative:** He had the vision to see existence where there was non-existence
- **Allen was inclusive and evangelistic:** He was serious about expanding the Kingdom of God
- **Allen was in tune with and responsive** to the issues and needs of his time and community. Allen discerned the will of God in his generation.
- **Allen dared to be different:** He was trail blazer. he didn't engage in carbon copy construction

Let us build...

With our history as our guide,
With our finger on the pulse of the present,
And With a vision for greater than what has been.