



St James's
PICCADILLY

Prayer Vigil

Saturday 19th August 2023
4-6pm



250 years ago today, a 16 year old boy, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano was preparing to be baptised at the font in St James's Church Piccadilly.

He had been prepared for baptism by Revd Thomas Skinner, a clergyman who lived in Marylebone, and with the agreement of the then rector of St James's, William Parker, on 20th August 1773, which that year was a Friday, Ottobah was baptised in his parish church.

This evening's vigil is largely silent prayer, before the Eucharist service tomorrow honouring this former member of our congregation. It is a chance to keep silence in this place, listen to some of his words, and hear the contemporary resonances of this African-British theologian, whose writings and teachings are so immersed in the Christian faith he expressed as a teenager at his baptism.

Prayers will be used from the 1662 baptism service, and the Scripture readings he used in his book are repeated at the end of each period of prayer. Ottobah himself was a person of prayer, and called for days of prayer, fasting and repentance in his book 'Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery'. The force of his writing is expressive of the force and starkness of the promises made at baptism then and now.

In the 1662 Prayer book which was in use at St James's at the time, Ottobah was asked

Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow nor be led by them?

I renounce them all.

Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?

I will endeavour so to do, God being my helper.

During the vigil, please move wherever you feel comfortable without disturbing others.

There is the opportunity to light candles throughout the time of prayer.

Some chairs are placed by the font and the new commemorative stone plaque for your use.

VIGIL

At 4pm the priest says

The Lord be with you: **and also with you.**

Welcome to St James's Church Piccadilly for this Vigil of Prayer on the eve of the 250th anniversary of the baptism of Quoba Ottobah Cugoano. A chance to keep silence together in this place, to reflect, meditate, pray.

A time to give thanks for the prophetic clarion call that his writings represent, both then and now.

A time to repent of the evil not only of the transatlantic slave trade or of the enslavement of people today, but of every thought, word or deed that makes enslavement possible: de-humanising thoughts and attitudes that have their roots in the human heart and find their way into public discourse.

A time to pray in penitence and hope for our own day: not only focussed on him as a historical figure, but listening to his call to account that is communal, structural, national, global.

A time to reflect on the power of baptism to form fearless communities of faith who are called to face the evils of the world as it is, acknowledge both suffering and complicity, refuse despair, and place our hope in the God whose promise of life in abundance is eternal and good and true.

Let us pray

Prayer from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer Service of baptism

Almighty and everlasting God,
who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water;
and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy Baptism;
and by the Baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, didst sanctify the element of water to the mystical washing away of sin:

We beseech thee, for thine infinite mercies,
that thou wilt mercifully look upon these thy servants;
wash them and sanctify them with the Holy Ghost;
that they, being delivered from thy wrath,
may be received into the ark of Christ's Church;
and being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope,
and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world,
that finally they may come to the land of everlasting life,
there to reign with thee world without end,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

READING *from Thoughts and Sentiments*

(Ottobah writes of his own experience of being kidnapped and enslaved.)

When a vessel arrived to conduct us away to the ship, it was a most horrible scene; there was nothing to be heard but

rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men. Some would not stir from the ground, when they were lashed and beat in the most horrible manner.The cries of some, and the sight of their misery, may be seen and heard afar; but the deep sounding groans of thousands, and the great sadness of their misery and woe, under the heavy load of oppressions and calamities inflicted upon them, are such as can only be distinctly known to the ears of Jehovah Sabaoth.

The farther and wider that the discovery and knowledge of such an enormous evil, as the base and villainous treatment and slavery which the poor unfortunate Black People meet with, is spread and made known, the cry for justice, even virtue lifting up her voice, must rise the louder and higher, for the scale of equity and justice to be lifted up in their defence. *And doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice?* But who will regard the voice and hearken to the cry?

SCRIPTURE Numbers 15.16 and Matthew 7.12

You and the stranger who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.....
In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Silence is kept

At 4.20pm

READING from *Thoughts and Sentiments*

(On the evil of one person thinking they can own another, and of the equality of all human beings made by God.)

Any property taken away from others, whether by stealth, fraud, or violence, must be wrong; but to take away men themselves, and keep them in slavery, must be worse. *Skin for skin, all that a man hath would be given for his life;* and would rather lose his property to any amount whatever, than to have his liberty taken away, and be kept as a slave. It must be an inconceivable fallacy to think otherwise: none but the inconsiderate, most obdurate and stubborn, could ever think that it was right to enslave others.

If nothing else be different or contrary among them, but that of features and complexion, in that respect, they are all equally alike entitled to the enjoyment of every mercy and blessing of God.

It does not alter the nature and quality of a man, whether he wears a black or a white coat, whether he puts it on or strips it off, he is still the same man. And so likewise, when a man comes to die, it makes no difference whether he was black or white, whether he was male or female, whether he was great or small, or whether he was old or young; none of these differences alter the essentiality of the man, any more than he had wore a black or a white coat and thrown it off for ever.

SCRIPTURE Numbers 15.16 and Matthew 7.12

You and the stranger who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.....

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Silence is kept.

At 4.40pm

READING *from Thoughts and Sentiments*

(Anyone who presumes to think they can own another person is a thief. It is therefore the duty of a human being to “get out” of that situation.....)

The taking away the natural liberties of men, and compelling them to any involuntary slavery, or compulsory service, is an injury and robbery contrary to all law, civilization, reason, justice, equity, and humanity: therefore when men break through the laws of God, and the rules of civilization among men, and go forth to steal, to rob, to plunder, to oppress and to enslave, and to destroy their fellow-creatures, the laws of God and man require that they should be suppressed, and deprived of their liberty, or perhaps their lives.

But if any man should buy another man without his own consent, and compel him to his service and slavery without any agreement of that man to serve him, the enslaver is a robber, and a defrauder of that man every day. Wherefore it is as much the duty of a man who is robbed in that manner to get out of the hands of his enslaver, as it is for any honest community of men to get out of the hands of rogues and villains.

SCRIPTURE Numbers 15.16 and Matthew 7.12

You and the stranger who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.....

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Silence is kept.

At 5pm

READING *from Thoughts and Sentiments*

(Christianity does not permit any form of enslavement. But in a 'Christian government', politics is corrupted both by the rich and influential people who go into it, and by the lobbying of others who want to retain their economic advantage. This corruption of politics continues without redress or consequence.)

I would have my African countrymen to know and understand, that the destroyers and enslavers of men can be no Christians; for Christianity is the system of benignity and love, and all its votaries are devoted to honesty, justice, humanity, meekness, peace and good-will to all men.

But so it happens in general, that men of activity and affluence, by whatever way they are possessed of riches, or have acquired a greatness of such property, they are always preferred to take the lead in matters of government, so that the greatest depredators, warriors, contracting companies of merchants, and rich slave-holders, always endeavour to push themselves on to get power and interest in their favour; that whatever crimes any of them commit they are seldom

brought to a just punishment. Unless that something of this kind had been the case, 'tis impossible to conceive how such an enormous evil as the slave-trade could have been established and carried on under any Christian government.

As this enormous iniquity is not conjecture, but an obvious fact, occasioned by that dreadful and wicked business of slavery, were the inhabitants of Great-Britain to hear tell of any other nation that murdered one hundred thousand innocent people annually, they would think them an exceeding inhuman, barbarous, and wicked people indeed, and that they would be surely punished by some signal judgment of Almighty God.

SCRIPTURE Numbers 15.16 and Matthew 7.12

You and the stranger who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.....
In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Silence is kept.

At 5.20pm

READING *from Thoughts and Sentiments*

(A strong rejection of individualism in favour of structural change.)

Alas! alas! poor unhappy mortal! to experience such treatment from men that take upon themselves the sacred name of Christians!

.....A few may become free, and get themselves liberated from that cruel and galling yoke of bondage; but what are these to the whole, even hundreds of thousands, held and perpetrated in all the prevalent and intolerable calamities of that state of bondage and exile. The emancipation of a few, while ever that evil and predominant business of slavery is continued, cannot make that horrible traffic one bit the less criminal.

So it ought to be the universal rule of duty to all men that fear God and keep his commandments, to do good to all men wherever they can; and when they find any wronged and injured by others, they should endeavour to deliver the ensnared whatever their grievances may be; and should this sometimes lead them into war they might expect the protection and blessing of heaven.

SCRIPTURE Numbers 15.16 and Matthew 7.12

You and the stranger who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance.....

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Silence is kept.

At 5.40pm

READING from *Thoughts and Sentiments*

(A challenge to the church not only to pray but to act in accordance with the law of God founded on love.)

But why think ye prayers in churches and chapels only will do ye good, if your charity do not extend to pity and regard your fellow creatures perishing through ignorance, under the heavy yoke of subjection and bondage, to the cruel and avaricious oppression of brutish profligate men; and when both the injured, and their oppressors, dwell in such a vicinity as equally to claim your regard?

The whole law of God is founded upon love, and the two grand branches of it are these; thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all thy soul; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The taking away of the natural liberties of men, and compelling them to any involuntary slavery or compulsory service, is an injury and robbery contrary to all law, civilisation, reason, justice, equity, and humanity.

No name, whether Christian or Pagan, has any thing to do with baptism; if the requisite qualities of knowledge and faith be found in a man, he may be baptized let his name be what it will.

And Christianity does not require that we should be deprived of our own personal name, or the name of our ancestors; but it may very fitly add another name unto us, Christian, or one anointed. And it might as well be answered so to that question in the English liturgy,
What is your name?—A Christian.

At 5.55pm the priest says the closing prayer from the Book of Common Prayer Baptism Service

Almighty and immortal God, the aid of all that need,
the helper of all that flee to thee for succour,
the life of them that believe,
and the resurrection of the dead:

We call upon thee for these persons,
that they may receive remission of their sins by spiritual
regeneration.

Receive them, O Lord:

and as thou hast promised by thy well-beloved Son, saying,
Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

So give now unto us that ask;

let us that seek find;

open the gate unto us that knock;

that these persons may enjoy the everlasting benediction of
thy heavenly washing,

and may come to the eternal kingdom which thou hast
promised by Christ our Lord.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, which art in heaven,

hallowed be thy Name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done on earth

as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive them that trespass against us.

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

CLOSING RESPONSES

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

May the soul of Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, and the souls of
all the departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

And rise in glory.

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

250th anniversary of the baptism of Quobna Ottobah Cugoano

TOMORROW - Sunday 20th August 2023 at 11am



Exactly 250 years ago on this day, Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, aged 16, was baptised at the Grinling Gibbons font. He had been trafficked from modern day Ghana to the Caribbean, brought to London and then freed. He was baptised in order that he could not be enslaved again.

His remarkable call to account and demand for the total abolition of the

slave trade addressed to 'the Inhabitants of Great Britain' published in 1787 is still in print today. Along with fellow abolitionists Olaudah Equiano and William Wilberforce, he worshipped regularly at St James's through the 1780s.



Our guest preacher on Sunday 20th August is the Bishop of Croydon, the Rt Revd Rosemarie Mallett, and a new commemorative plaque will be dedicated. Lunch for the whole congregation will be served afterwards to include jollof rice, grilled chicken and fried plantain.

Please come to honour this former congregation member of St James's and hear his words which resonate through our church and society today.



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