

Reading from 8/18/19 service: *The Case for Reparations*

Reading

Our reading this morning is an excerpt from “Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination” by Robin D.G. Kelley:

The Civil War had barely been settled when Colonel P.H. Anderson of Big Spring, Tennessee, dispatched a letter to his former slave, Jourdan, inviting him to return to the Anderson plantation as a paid laborer. Despite promises of freedom, good treatment, and fair wages, Jourdan was more than a little suspicious of the offer. With the help of Lydia Maria Child, a prolific writer, abolitionist, schoolteacher and Unitarian, he dictated a very powerful letter to his old master. He began by expressing concern that he and his wife Mandy were:

“Afraid to go back without proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor’s visits for me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to.

If you fail to pay us for the faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any payday for the Negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire. In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve-and die, if it come to that- than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters... Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.”

Here ends our reading.