



THE BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH LAY ORGANIZATION DEVOTIONAL | JANUARY 2025

501 West Orange Avenue | Tallahassee, Florida

The Reverend Michael Brian Price, M.Div., Senior Minister

Wednesday, *Justice* January 1, 2025

“Imani!”

“Coming up to them at that very moment, [Anna] gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” – Luke 2:38 NIV

On Today, *Justice* January 1, 2025, persons across the African Diaspora are celebrating the last day of Kwanzaa. Established by Professor Maulana Karenga in 1966, Kwanzaa is a 7-day period set aside to reiterate and celebrate the continued work of building Black solidarity around the world. Today’s theme is “Imani,” which means faith. Within the Kwanzaa holiday context, Imani is faith in Black people and faith in the continued Black struggle for justice and equity. Despite Roman colonization, first century Afro-Asiatic Jews possessed “Imani” in their people and their freedom struggle as well. In their interpretations of Isaiah 9, Micah 5, Zechariah 9 and other Hebrew texts, they envisioned a divinely placed Jewish King who would overthrow the oppressive Roman Empire.

The first Sunday in *Justice* January is also the Second Sunday After Christmas on the Christian Liturgical Calendar. The concurrent Gospel reading is Luke 2:36-40, in Year C of the “Lectionary” found on page 795 of the *African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal*. In this prophetic passage, Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for consecration. There, they met, among other persons, Anna, a prophesying widow, who spent over half of her life in the temple courts praying and fasting. When Anna saw the baby Jesus, she told everyone assembled that he, Jesus, would bring redemption (deliverance) to Jerusalem. In Hebrew history, there had been a 400-year biblical gap between Malachi’s ministry and Matthew’s gospel, a time when some Jews believed that God was silent, because no significant revelations were written. However, Anna, a dutiful temple servant and visionary, possessed Imani, knowing that God was still working on behalf of her people.

In 2015, Harvard University Visiting Professor of Theology and African American Episcopal Priest, The Reverend Kelly Brown Douglas, Ph.D., successfully published *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. In Dr. Douglas’ text, she examined the history of the “Stand Your Ground” western judicial premise, which she argued is central to the myth of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism in America. Racist philosophers fused this myth into Christianity and American culture which brought about the genocide of millions of Black people, who dared to challenge the tenets of Stand Your Ground, from the 15th century to present. To honor the lives of the Gabriel Prossers, Denmark Vesseys, Trayvon Martins, and Sandra Blands of the past, Dr. Douglas asserted that, “This is a Kairos time. It is the time for each of us to be embodied realities of a black prophetic tradition and with moral memory, moral identity, moral participation and moral imagination begin to create the world we crave for our daughters and sons.” It is a world free of racist Stand Your Ground policies; a world where Black people can live in full freedom.

Over 2000 years ago at the height of the oppressive Roman Empire, Anna prophesied about the future work of the baby Jesus. In this ever-evolving, oppressive American Empire that we live in today, Dr. Douglas picks up this prophesy and show readers how Christ is, indeed, at work in the world today. In *Luke’s Gospel* and *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, the quest for liberation is not unilateral – it is a collective movement. This revolutionary Jesus, of Anna’s prophesy, is alive in us through the Holy Spirit. To reimagine a redemptive world where a victorious, divinely inspired, anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialistic movement, establishes free, safe and sustainable communities for historically marginalized people, we must possess *Imani*. Christians Activate! Selah.

The Bethel AME Church Lay Organization remains fully committed to the teaching, training and equipping of Methodists for liberating service in the church, community, country and world. Please join us at our next local Lay Meeting in The Efferson-Morgan Fellowship Hall of The Bethel AME Church on Tuesday, *Justice* January 21, 2025, from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. Dinner will be served. - Brother Kyle Harris, Ph.D., Contributor and Local Lay President