

## **Juneteenth Sardis Cemetery Reflection & Prayer Walk**

Go at your own pace and return across the street carefully, on your own time. You can reflect on the questions on your own or talk with those around you.

### **Reflection Stop #1**

**Location:** Historical Marker at the cemetery for Enslaved Africans and Indigenous Persons

#### **Read: Psalm 139:1-12**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night',  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

**Pause and Reflect:** This land was originally home to the Sugaree Indians, part of the Catawba Tribe. Later, Scottish and Irish immigrants, among others, who made up Sardis Presbyterian Church at its beginning settled in this area. Enslaved Africans were also present on this land as well. Pause and consider the many different people who have had a home on this land. They came to and left this land, some by choice and some by force. All of them and all of their paths were known by God and God's spirit did not flee from them.

**Pray:** God, though we do not have full names and records of each person who is buried in this cemetery, God, you know them by name. You knit them together in their mother's womb and your presence walked with them through troubling and joyful times in life. In prayer, we remember all who are buried here, the grief and pain they might have experienced, the families they nurtured, the praises they sang in worship, the liberation they experienced and their faith that led them to begin new churches in Charlotte. Amen.

### **Reflection Stop #2**

**Location:** Cemetery for Enslaved Africans and Indigenous Persons. Walk around the cemetery, notice the landscape and final resting places for the 69+ who are buried there.

### **Read: Ephesians 2:19**

So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.

**Pause and Reflect:** Contemplate how these members of the Sardis church family are a part of the household of God. Imagine what gifts, passions, and love they brought to the worship and life of Sardis.

**Pray:** Thankfully we praise you, O God, for your liberating power

that broke shackles of oppression and restored humanity to the disenfranchised.

Makes us instruments of grace to resist slavery, in all manifestations, that no soul shall be denied the right to thrive and fully realize their divine purpose in you. Amen.

*(from Rev. Sterling Morse, coordinator for African intercultural congregational support for the Presbyterian Church).*

### **Reflection Stop #3**

**Location:** Iron gates that lead into the cemetery where Sardis founding members are buried. Walk around the cemetery noticing the names and symbols on the tombstones.

### **Read: Hebrews 11:1-3**

Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see. The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith. By faith we understand that the universe has been created by a word from God so that the visible came into existence from the invisible.

**Pause and Reflect:** What examples of faith are visible here in the cemetery? What elements of our ancestors' faith journey remains unseen?

**Pray:** God we celebrate the many ways the early members of Sardis endured challenges and hardships to build the church that we know today. We praise you for their enduring faith that was passed on from generation to generation. May we learn from their faith, their perseverance, and their shortcomings as we seek to faithfully follow Christ today. Amen.

#### **Reflection Stop #4**

**Location:** Wooded Trail. Walk along the wooded trail or along the edge of the trees at the border of the cemetery.

#### **Read: Galatians 3:27-29**

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

**Pause and Reflect:** We have come a long way on the journey toward liberation and on the journey of being one in Christ. What do you imagine being "one in Christ Jesus" looks like in the church of the future?

**Pray:** We pray, O Lord, for change. Jesus, you revealed God through your wise words and loving deeds, and we encounter you still today in the faces of those whom society has pushed to the margins. Guide us, through the love you revealed, to establish the justice you proclaimed, that all peoples might dwell in harmony and peace, united by that one love that binds us to each other, and to you. And most of all, Lord, change our routine worship and work into genuine encounter with you and our better selves so that our lives will be changed for the good of all. Amen

*(Prayer adapted from Racial Healing and Liturgical Resources)*

#### **Reflection Stop #5**

**Location:** Stand in between the historic cemeteries near the Scout Hut/in the parking lot. Look back toward the cemeteries on each side. Then face toward the current sanctuary across the street.

**Read:** Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Pause & Reflect:** Learning from our history as we look forward, what might the Spirit of God be calling us to do in the future? What challenges and sin might we need to let go of in order to live into the fullness of Christ's grace and joy?

**Pray:** God, you have been here since the very beginning, and you will be here until the very end. You are always at work doing far more than we can see and imagine. Forgive us for the sins we've hidden or held tightly too. Give us grace and hope for the future. May we walk together as the body of Christ in the world with love and humility. Amen.

### **Rationale for a Reflective Walk around Sardis' historic cemeteries**

Galatians 3:27-28 says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This scripture is one of the lectionary texts for this Sunday, June 19<sup>th</sup>. June 19<sup>th</sup> is also the federal holiday, Juneteenth, which celebrates emancipation from slavery. This walk is meant to guide us in reflecting on Sardis' history and our future as a church. It is meant to help us remember all of the members who made up the Sardis community, including those who were enslaved, throughout its history and our calling to live into our unity in Christ.

### **What is Juneteenth?**

Juneteenth is a celebration that honors family, community, and freedom. The word "Juneteenth" is a combination of the word "June" and the number "nineteen" to signify the month and day (June 19, 1865) that U.S. Army General Gordon Granger led Union soldiers to Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War had ended and enslaved Africans were free. The very first Juneteenth celebrations represented the possibility of reuniting with loved ones, the magnitude of choice and personal autonomy, and most of all the freedom to heal, live, and love fully and completely.

It took approximately 2.5 years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation for the news to reach the enslaved people in Texas that slaves in the rebellious states had been freed and for a sufficient number of soldiers to be in this remote area to enforce the executive order. Texans began celebrating Juneteenth in 1866 and it was proclaimed an official state holiday in 1980. While Texas chose June 19<sup>th</sup> as its Emancipation Day, some localities used the date when its enslaved population received the news of liberation. Yet others preferred January 1<sup>st</sup>, the date the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in 1863 or September 22<sup>nd</sup>, when President Lincoln first announced the Proclamation in 1862.

### **Sardis Presbyterian Church History**

There are at least 69 graves in the cemetery for Enslaved Africans and Native Americans. All have field stones. Radar and ground penetration was done to mark graves that did not have markings. There are connections in the Kirkpatrick family of decedents buried on both sides of the cemetery. When the church was founded, it only had about 350 people. The cemetery dates back to the late 1800s. We do not have records of the full names of each person buried there and exactly where they are buried, but we do know that the slaves were called "servants" in the church minutes. The servants were sometimes mentioned by first name in the church minutes when they were baptized and as the "servant of." Enslaved persons were communing members according to the history book.

After the Civil War, freed enslaved persons withdrew from the church and went on to form their own churches or join with other Black churches that formed after the Emancipation Proclamation. Their departure from Sardis was a gradual process. In 1884 there were only three black members listed on the roles at Sardis, but it is estimated that at one time, slaves comprised one fourth to one third of the congregation.