

Brooklyn College Archives and Special Collections  
Collection Name: The Papers of Rev. Dr. William Augustus Jones, Jr. (Accession #2007-012)  
Title of Sermon: On Leaving The Field Clear  
Date: 9/10/1989  
Original Format: Video  
File number(s): A016  
Transcriptionist: Sheana Corbridge

(choir sings “A Little More Faith & Grace”)

SPEAKER #1: Welcome to the Bethany worship experience. We invite you to share with us in person each Lord’s day when services are held at 8 and 11 a.m. Beginning Monday evening September 11<sup>th</sup>, and continuing through Wednesday evening, Dr. Jones will be preaching revival services at Elmwood United Presbyterian Church, 135 Elmwood Avenue East, Orange, New Jersey. The Reverend Robert Berkins [phonetic] is pastor. On Sunday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, we will observe Dr. Jones's 27th anniversary as pastor of Bethany. Our guest at the 8 am service will be the Reverend Willard Ashley of Monumental Baptist Church of Jersey City. At 11 am, The Reverend Albert Campbell, pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will be the preacher. You are warmly invited to share in all these services. God bless you today and always.

(choir sings “Lead Me, Guide Me”)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: Amen. Today I lift up verse 19 in the 12th chapter of Paul’s letter to Christians in Rome. “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” That's the King James rendition of that passage. The Montgomery translation puts it this way, “Never revenge yourself beloved, but leave the field clear for God's wrath. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord.” *On Leaving The Field Clear*, that's what I want to talk about, holy spirit willing for the next little while. A man named Moses taught retributive justice. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Better than thirty-three hundred years later, a man named Martin King espoused the Jesus ethic, turn the other cheek, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Some thirteen hundred years before Christ, Moses one of the peak personalities of The Old Testament, espoused the ethic of retributive justice and then there appeared on the horizon, a Galilean field preacher who taught and lived an ethic of love—and then nearly two thousand years later, there appeared alongside Martin King, a man named Malcolm X, whose ethic was after the order of Moses. Moses and Malcolm, the messiah, and Martin, each one of them preeminently concerned about justice. One of them died for the whole of humankind. His name is Jesus. Two of them died in pursuit of justice. The other one, Moses, died enroute to the land of promise. Malcolm followed Moses, Martin followed the master and across the centuries we humans have tended to line up either behind Moses or the master. Now there have been some who have attempted to embrace both, deciding on the basis of the situation. Others have clung unswervingly to one or the other. I’m afraid that the Moses devotees have made a significant error in that they have failed to understand that the Mosaic method was really the prelude to the master's method. It was an

introductory ethic and an interim ethic pointing way to an ethic pure and noble to be enunciated and enacted by none other than Jesus the Christ, the eternal son of the living God—and had mighty Moses lived in Jesus’ day, he would have followed the master. You recall do you not, his appearance with Elijah on the peak of Mount of Transfiguration, when God thundered from glory, “this is my beloved son, hear ye him.” Both Moses and Elijah saw no man save Jesus—but from a historical perspective, one of the hallmarks of the Moses era was this concept of retributive justice, which said if you are wronged by another get even with the offender, \_\_\_\_\_?? \_\_\_\_\_?? retaliation, revenge, repayment—that's the way to handle injustice and the debate goes on. The nomenclature has been altered to some degree but it's the same debate. Violence versus non-violence, the Moses method versus the master's method, Malcolm X versus Martin King. Where should we stand? What ought be our stance as followers of the lamb? How significant this query in the present order, for mean, mad, lowdown, despicable behavior has manifested itself once again in the course of the black pilgrimage. Yusef Hawkins, a lad of sixteen, his future bright with promise, now sleeps in the sod. A tragic victim of youthful white racism and the whole diatribe smacks and smells of racism through and through. There was inordinate concern about some white girl liking and dating a black boy. What was new about that? Such opposites have always been drawn to each other even during the days of slavery. Daytime segregation and nighttime amalgamation were real long before the ringing of freedom's bell. Why the diverse coloration of this congregation is first-hand testimony to the fact that black folks and white folks been sleeping together for a long time.

The irrationalism of racism is primarily responsible for the cold-blooded murder of young Hawkins. The behavior of the judiciary and the comments of certain politicians and even religious leaders—and the surly attitudes of many in Bensonhurst, all of these make it patently clear that the racist monster is alive and well in this peculiar city—and it is perfectly natural for sane, sensitive people to respond and react in some manner. If your humanity is tied at all to the sane and the ethical, you feel impelled to do something in the wake of barbaric behavior. What do you do? What do we do? A people yet in pilgrimage in a land that we slaved for and even died for, what in the world do we do? A terrible wrong has been committed. A grievous sin has assaulted all that is decent and humane, and we know from the scriptures, that sin always demands a penalty. We subscribe to that solemn declaration, “be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The question is, who will affect the reaping? Who will meet out the punishment? That's the question. That is the question, but wait a minute, there's a larger question and a better question. There's a question far more germane than who will do it. The better question is this, who can best do it? Now there are those who don't want the sympathizers, the aggrieved and the victimized to do anything at all. The mayor said the other day, “don't march.” The bishop of Brooklyn said in some strange sort of pontifical manner, “don't march” —and Bensonhurst residents said, “don't march” and even some blacks said, “don't march.” Such advice, in light of the gravity of the situation is pure poppycock. In the clutches of great crisis, sensitive spirits have to ventilate. That's really why Jesus sanctioned that massive march on the Sunday before crucifixion day. He not only sanctioned it, he took a little time to explain it. Said he to them that criticized, “if these hold their peace, the rocks will cry out.” In the wake of grievous affliction and undeserved suffering, sensitive souls must ventilate—but the question is not one of ventilation. The question today is one of retaliation. Since it is divinely decreed by the high court of heaven that sin has to be punished, who will do it and who is best equipped to do it? And I hear a certain man give answer to the question, as his answer says, in substance, “ventilate but don't retaliate.” I

hear the diminutive tent maker from Tarsus, the man named Paul says, “don't behave after the manner of the barbarians.” I hear him echo his Lord here in his missive to the Romans. The people, much like the Americans, people who believe that might made for right. I hear Paul declare after the manner and spirit of his Lord, “Dearly beloved avenge not yourselves but rather give place unto wrath for it is written vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord.” A closer and clearer rendition of the text is this—never revenge yourself beloved but leave the field clear for God's wrath. For it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord. Leave the field clear for God's wrath. Leave the field clear. You, leave the field clear, you the insulted ones, the injured and the aggrieved and the afflicted, leave the field clear. You who are wounded and warned and weary, leave the field clear. You who have grown sick and tired of the murder of the innocent and police brutality and judicial injustice, leave the field clear. You who yet mourn the death of Evans and Stuart and Bumpers [phonetic] and Griffith and all the others, leave the field clear for God's wrath. You, all of you—every one of you. All of you who are tempted to take matters into your own hands, leave the field clear. I tell you, leave it clear. Not because you are without a standing army. Not because you have no munitions arsenal. Not because you're outnumbered. You leave the field clear because of the divine exclusive. Gods got an exclusive on vengeance. Vengeance is mine and mine alone. I will repay says the Lord. Leave the field clear for God's wrath. I like this imagery. I like the field concept. It suggests conflict and battle and hostile forces gathered and arrayed against goodness. The context indicates that evil has inflicted terrible injury on that which is right and honorable, and goodness and righteousness having been wounded, attempted to strike back but a voice bearing an infinite accent cries aloud, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but leave the field clear for God's wrath.” I believe I understand this warning against retaliation. I believe I understand why the victims of demonic assault ought to keep the field open. First of all, God alone can monitor the field. Only God can do that. Only God can monitor the field. For he's the only one who sees the field in its totality. He sees the entirety of the happening. He sees every aspect and every detail of the diatribe. God sees every infraction and every dirty deed and every despicable play—and furthermore he sees the evil intents of wicked hearts and evil minds—and remember his view of the field is total. He sees it from eternity to eternity. Secondly, God alone can measure the degree of demonism and the intensity of the injury. Now, I don't know everything that perverted spirits put into the slave trade a long time ago. I don't know by what perverse powers the human heart and the human head can conjoin to enslave others on the basis of coloration. I don't know what kinds of spirits concocted the idea of the middle passage and auction blocks. I don't know the extent of the evil that framed segregation and discrimination laws. I don't know the roots of racism in Howard Beach and Bensonhurst and the families of those boys who ganged up on Yusef Hawkins. I can't fathom the reasoning of the mayor and the Bishop of Brooklyn, but I'm not powerless for I know somebody who can. God can. Nothing is hidden from his view. Nothing is off limits to divine scrutiny. God not only knows the degree and the depth of demonism at work, he knows the intensity of the injury. He knows the pain of broken hearts and shattered dreams. He knows the hurt that people feel when they are denied on the basis of color. He knows every burden we bear and every sorrow we share, and he knows just how much we can bear. Not only is God the only one who can monitor the field and measure the degree of demonism and the intensity of the injury, he's the only one who can match the deed with proper vengeance and mete it out with absolute precision. You and I are not equipped to execute vengeance. Our vision is too limited, our rational factors are inadequate. While we can see every aspect of a single happening on the field, if vengeance were left to us, we'd never get it right. We'd mete out either too much or too little and since God is just, his justice must be protected and preserved. He alone can match the

deed with appropriate judgment and justice. He sees far deeper than what our eyes behold, and God knows all about our history in this land and elsewhere. He knows that we as a people, have never hated whites. When was a white boy killed in a black neighborhood of New York? God knows that we have never compiled a list of mean whites who sought to destroy us. Following World War II, the Jews constructed a list of every known Nazi war criminal and they've been hunting them down for over 40 years—and they're still looking for them. We've had to deal with the Bilbos and the Tallmages and all of the mean, mad racists, but we've never come up with a list. Never in our history have we been a revengeful people. In slavery, our African mothers, working in white folks' kitchens didn't put poison in their food and they came from Africa where they learned about all kinds of deadly potions. Ours is a history of humaneness toward whites. While we've treated each other worse than we've treated them, our primary problem has been our self-hatred and our lack of love and respect for one another. (loud applause) Our peril is our own self-destruction. We need to be delivered from ourselves. So, I submit to you that this is no time to begin behaving counter to the Christian ethic and all that has characterized our history. This is not the time to seek revenge and retaliation. Rather, leave the field open to God's wrath. Now in order to do that you got to get out of God's way. Keep the field open. Don't you put your mess on the field. Keep the field open. Wait on the Lord and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait I say on the Lord stand still for a little while and see the salvation of the Lord. I refuse to believe that Emmett Till died in vain. Medgar Evers didn't go down in vain and Viola Liuzzo didn't perish for not, and heaven knows Martin King and all the other martyrs didn't die in vain. We've got to leave the field clear for God's wrath. For I hear music, I hear music coming from the long ago. I hear music I tell you, music coming up from slave quarters in the deep dark of the night on southern plantations. I hear the slaves are singing, "My God is gonna move this wicked race and raise up a nation that shall obey." Don't you ever forget their words. He sees all you do and hears all you say. My God is writing all the time. Vengeance is his and he will repay Now when you wait on him, that doesn't mean that you stop working. Paul here tells you how to work. He says if you hit him at hungers, feed him. If he thirsts, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good. Keep the field clear and watch God work. Watch how God handles hellions and watch him as he scatters the scornful and watch him as he rightens wrongs and corrects failures. Watch God while he blesses your own soul. Yes! If you wait and work while you wait, the Lord will move in your behalf. Do I have a witness? I know whereof I speak; I've seen the Lord God almighty do his thing. He's done it throughout history. He did it for a man named Daniel, he did it for the Hebrew boys, he did it for Paul and Silas, he did it for the \_\_\_\_\_?? prisoner and I declare I've seen him do it for me. Do I have a witness? Yes Lord! This and then I'm through. There once was a happening in my own experience where a man did me a terrible disservice. He did it after I had done him a great big favor—and when I say great big favor, I'm talking about a sure enough great big favor. A favor that very few folks would do for anybody else, and that man did me an awful disservice. It hurt me to my heart because it cost me a lot and I was tempted to strike back but I heard another voice and that voice said, "Don't retaliate. Rather ventilate, talk to me about it. Don't fight, rather, pray and let me handle it" and I went on my knees in prayer, and I'll tell you what, I asked God to do. I asked God to remove ranker and resentment from my spirit. I asked him to take the madness out of my soul. I told him to let me not be angry because of what had happened—and I declare unto you that's what the Lord did. He fixed my heart; he blessed my soul and everything that I thought I had lost he's replaced it fourfold. Yes! Somebody said he'll fight my battle if I just keep still. Won't he do it? Won't he do it? Has he ever fought your battle? Has he ever conquered your fall? The Lord is my battle-axe! The Lord is my

sword and my seal! The Lord knows how to take care of his own. Vengeance is mine says the Lord, I will repay. I'll take care of the field. You just serve me the best you can. Keep on loving, keep on trusting, keep on walking in the light, keep your hand in my hand and leave the rest of me. I'll fix it. Yes! He will leave the field open and keep it open for vengeance belongeth to the Lord. Vengeance is a divine exclusive. You can't handle it, but he can. We can't fix the racist ethos in this town but working together with God he can. I declare, he can. Do you believe he can? (crowd responds "yes!") Yes! Hallelujah yes! I know he can. The doors of the church are open. Anybody here today who wants to subscribe to what Jesus is all about? Anybody here who wants to say, "I believe with all my heart that Jesus is the Christ, I accept him as Lord and master and pledge to serve him so long as life shall last?" If that's your decision, we bid you come while we sing this blessed hymn of invitation, "Thy Way, O Lord" Oh that's a great hymn. That ought be your prayer, "Thy way o Lord, not mine, thy will be done not mine; since thou for me did bleed, and now do intercede, each day I simply plead, thy will be done." The doors of of the church stand ajar, if there are persons present who live in the city but who have no church home and you know the Christ, you belong to some congregation elsewhere, we warmly invite you to come and unite with Bethany Church. Whoever you are, whatever your condition, the spirit says, come, as we stand and sing this blessed hymn, "Thy Way o Lord" selection 342. Lord, help you to come. Jesus is calling. Who will come today? God bless you, young man. Who else will come?

(choir and congregation sing "Thy Way o Lord")

JONES: Is there another? God bless. God bless. Is there another? The master is calling. Come to Jesus.

The creation of this transcript was generously funded by Jennifer Jones Austin.