

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

July 11, 2017

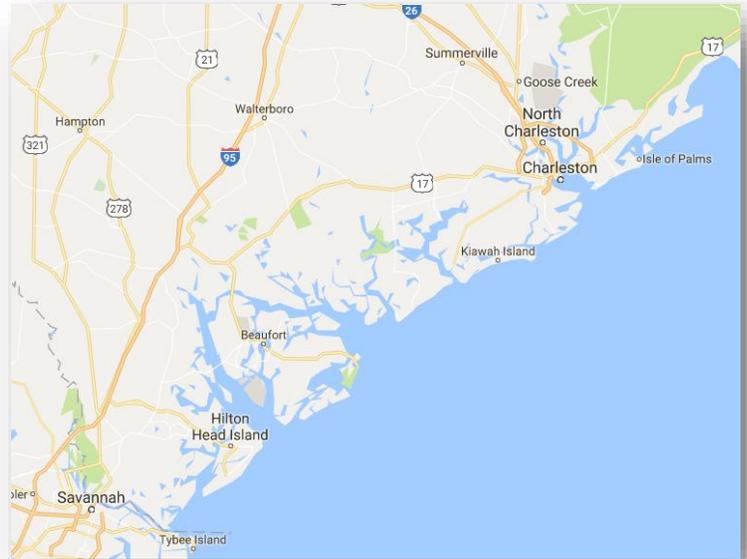
Our family has had more than a passing acquaintance with the Low Country of South Carolina. I moved to North Charleston in December, 1972 to join the ship's company of the USS STRONG (DD-758) as the Main Propulsion Assistant to the Chief Engineer.

Jill and I were married the next December, and we set up housekeeping near the Battery in downtown Charleston. We lived in about a third of what had been a slave house behind one of the Big Houses.

Nathan was born in Charleston's Navy Hospital (at a cost to us of \$7), and when he left home in Louisville many years later to seek his fortune, he moved to Charleston, where he became one of the famous horse-drawn carriage tour guides. He also worked as a chef at Kiawah Island before heading to the West, where he's been ever since.

Matt and Anna served a church in Beaufort for several years before they joined us in northern Virginia (the REAL northern Virginia), and they are very fond of the Low Country.

Finally, Jill and I have had a timeshare on Hilton Head Island for more than twenty years, and it was to that condo that we retreated last week. Every time we return to the Low Country, we wonder how we ever survived the heat and humidity there, but the journey is a good one, nonetheless.



I worshiped the first Sunday with a Methodist church on the island, and the second Sunday, I worshiped with a Lutheran church near our home at Lake Holiday, VA. I was praying for you, for Andrea, and for Sandra during your worship times here, and, while I enjoyed worshiping with other congregations, I'm looking forward to being with you on Sunday!

Both of these congregations were mostly white, but not entirely. At Hilton Head, there was a large African American family gathered for worship as part of a 4th of July family reunion, and so I sat with them. As it happened, I sat next to Julius, the octogenarian patriarch of the clan who had called the meeting.

Natives of Augusta, GA (where Jill went to college), Julius and his wife have lived on Hilton Head for nearly forty years. Julius was gracious and warm, and while he did not sing well in a musical sense, he sang magnificently in a spiritual sense. Julius sang with great energy, and mostly from memory. I really felt as though I were sitting beside my father. It was a holy time.

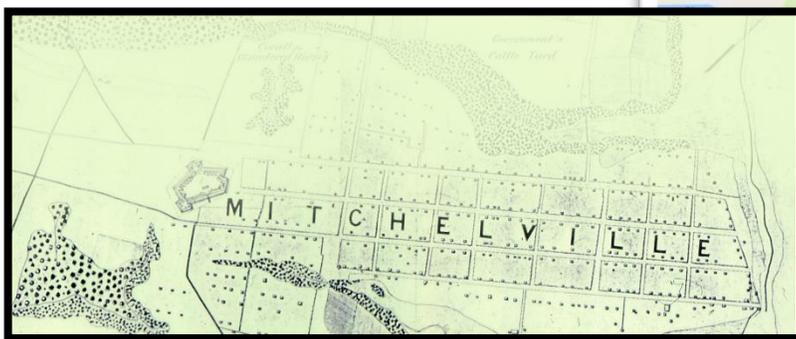
As you may know, our southeastern coast—especially the barrier islands—is known as the region of the Gullah/Geechee people. These are folk who mostly came to these shores as slaves, but because of the isolation of the islands, have kept a great deal of their African cultural heritage more or less intact.

I've had a New Testament in Gullah for several years, and when Jill and I learned that there remains a significant Gullah culture on Hilton Head, we spent a morning touring those areas. We were especially interested in seeing the ruins of the town of Mitchelville on the north end of the island.

Mitchelville claims to be the first self-governed freedmen's town in America. Before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863 and at the height of the Civil War, a group of escaped slaves, considered "contraband of war," set about creating their own town on the grounds of the former Drayton Plantation on Hilton Head Island.

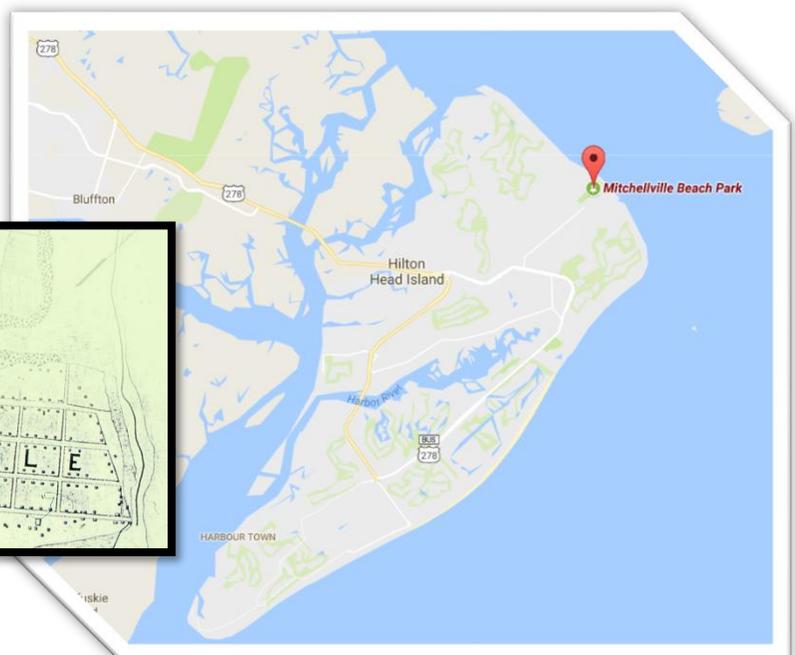
Here Union General Ormsby Mitchel created an actual town – instead of one of the more prevalent "camps" – with orderly streets, simple but accommodating wooden homes, a church, and most importantly, gave its inhabitants the freedom to govern themselves. The newly-minted citizens went about their business with elections, enacting various laws, collecting taxes, making a living, and naming their town "Mitchelville," in honor of the forward-thinking General Mitchel. A compulsory education law for children was enacted—most likely the first such law in the South.

If you'd like to try your hand at reading and pronouncing Gullah,



I've put 1 Corinthians 13 from *The Gullah Bible* at the end of this *Laptop*.¹

¹ <http://www.gullahbible.com/e-GullahNT/index.htm>



Because the weather was SO HOT (heat index over 100 most days), we stayed indoors a lot. We went to see *Wonder Woman*, went shopping, took naps . . . and I also did some reading.

I cleared out a number of journals in which my reading was behind, and I read *Nine Essential Things I've Learned About Life*, by Rabbi Harold Kushner,² a gift from my good friend, Rabbi Seth Bernstein. Here are the nine things, in case you're interested, and below are three quotes I especially liked.

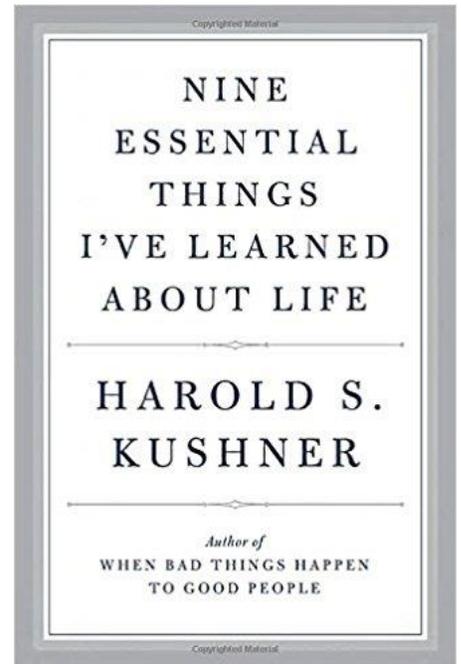
1. Lessons Learned Along the Way
2. God Is Not A Man Who Lives in the Sky
3. God Does Not Send the Problem: God Sends Us the Strength to Deal with the Problem
4. Forgiveness Is a Favor You Do Yourself
5. Some Things Are Just Wrong: Knowing That Makes Us Human
6. Religion Is What You Do, Not What You Believe
7. Leave Room for Doubt and Anger in Your Religious Outlook
8. To Feel Better About Yourself, Find Someone to Help
9. Give God the Benefit of the Doubt

- Rabbi David Wolpe: "Spirituality is what you feel. Theology is what you believe. Religion is what you do" (p. 103).
- "It may well be the case that the word 'religion' is related to the word 'ligament,' from the Latin *ligare*, 'to connect.' One might argue that the word refers to beliefs that connect a person to God, but I am inclined to side with Durkheim that the role of religion is to bind us to other people in order to evoke together the sense that God is in our midst. We don't go to church or synagogue to find God; God may indeed be more accessible in nature on a sunny day. We go to church or synagogue to find other worshippers who are looking for what we are looking for, and together we find it. We become something greater than our solitary selves" (p. 112).
- "People who invoke simplistic reasons for rejecting traditional religion but find God in spring flowers and changing leaves will have no problem as long as it's sunny out, but they will have no framework for making sense of a hurricane or, for that matter, a business reversal or a diagnosis of serious illness. At times like that, you need a tradition to turn to that has seen it all and has no illusions about the world. You need a community, people who have learned to find God in the shadows as readily as in the sunshine, to find Him in the courage of afflicted people and the helpfulness of their neighbors. And you need people whose faith compels them not to pity you or to question God on your behalf, but to hold you and dry your tears" (p. 106).

Thanks for being such a wonderful community for Jill and for me, for each other, and for the world.

Dave

² Harold Kushner, *Nine Essential Things I've Learned About Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015).



1 Corinthians 13 from *De Nyew Testament*

¹Eben ef A kin taak een all de language dem wa people da taak an wa de angel dem da taak, ef A ain lob oda people, all wa A da say ain mount ta nottin. E jes like de nise wen somebody da beat a bucket or wen a cymbal da soun too loud. ²Eben ef A got powa fa tell people wod wa God tell me fa say, an ef A kin ondastan all God plan wa e ain tell oda people an A know all ting, an ef A bleebe God sommuch dat e da gii me powa fa moob mountain, eben ef A able fa do all dem ting yah, ef A ain lob oda people, A ain wot nottin. ³Eben ef A gii way ebryting A got an A gree fa leh um bun me body, ef A ain lob oda people, all dat ain do me no good.

⁴Ef oona lob oda people, oona gwine beah wid um. Oona gwine be kind ta um. Oona ain gwine all de time wahn wa dey got, an oona ain gwine brag on oonasef an be oppity. ⁵Ef oona lob people, oona gwine be manisable all de time an oona ain gwine wahn ya own way. Oona ain gwine git bex, an oona ain gwine keep ting een oona haat ginst oda people wa do oona wrong. ⁶Ef oona lob oda people, oona ain gwine rejaice oba no ebil ting, bot oona gwine rejaice oba wa true. ⁷Ef oona lob people, oona gwine beah op onda ebryting wa people do ta oona. Oona gwine be ready fa bleebe good ting bout people. Oona gwine hope fa de betta bout um, an oona gwine pit op wid people an lob um eben wen oona da suffa.

⁸Lob ain neba gwine end. De wod wa God tell e people fa taak, time da come wen dem people ain gwine taak um no mo. De oda language dem wa people da taak, time da come wen people ain gwine taak dem no mo. An all de ting wa people know, time da come wen dey ain gwine know um no mo. ⁹Cause we ain know ebryting. We jes know paat. An eben dough God gii we de wod fa taak ta oda people, we ain able fa tell ebryting. ¹⁰Bot wen de time come wen all ting gwine be how dey sponse fa be, we ain gwine jes haf know ting, an we ain gwine jes haf do ting no mo.

¹¹Wen A been a chile, A beena taak same like chullun da taak. A beena tink like chullun da tink, an A beena ondastan same like chullun da ondastan. Bot now dat A a man, A done do way wid dem chilish ting. ¹²Wa ting we da see now, dey like wa we kin see een a mirror wa ain cleah. Bot den wen dat time come, we gwine see too good, eye ta eye. Dey plenty ting A ain know now, bot dat time dey, A gwine know all too good, jes like God da know all ting bout me too good.

¹³Now den, dey shree ting dat gwine las. People gwine bleebe. Dey gwine look fowaad wid hope, an dey gwine lob. Bot lob de ting dat great de mos.