Many kinds of stories are told through the art and iconography of Washington National Cathedral.

As expected, there are illustrations of biblical stories, as well as symbols representing complex theological ideas. Some artwork tells stories outlining the history of the Christian faith. And some images explore broad human experiences: love and kindness; stories about families or stories about courage. The long history of humankind can also be found among our art: pyramids and cathedrals, musicians and politicians, war and peace. Animals frolic and flowers blossom in depictions of the natural world.

Envisioned as a cathedral for national purposes, images from American history can also be found throughout the building. George Washington and other U.S. presidents can be found. Narratives of struggle, reconciliation and exploration have helped form America as we know it today, including the Civil War between the North and South.

Like many institutions, the Cathedral has been taking a closer look at what stories we tell, as well as the stories we have not told, in the artwork throughout the building. As our nation grows and our communities become more diverse, we look forward to expanding our historic and personal narratives.

**THE ONGOING STRUGGLE: HUMAN RIGHTS PORCH**

Just inside the main doors of the Cathedral is an area dedicated to sharing the stories of those whose lives were spent working to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all people, including:

A **JOHN T. WALKER** was the first African American Episcopal bishop of Washington: he oversaw the completion of the Cathedral building and was an outspoken opponent of apartheid and other human rights abuse.

B **ROSA PARKS** was an American activist in the civil rights movement best known for her pivotal role in the Montgomery bus boycott.

C **JONATHAN MYRICK DANIELS** was an Episcopal seminarian and civil rights activist, murdered in 1965 while shielding fellow activist 17-year-old Ruby Sales.
NEW STORIES TO TELL: SOUTH AISLE BAY

SOUTH AISLE BAY WINDOWS AND TABLETS

Until 2017 this space was filled by stained glass windows, with memorial tablets underneath, honoring the lives of Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and “Stonewall” Jackson. Those windows were installed in 1953 after a nationwide fundraising campaign by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Whatever the Cathedral’s motives at the time, we see now that these windows are inconsistent with our mission and have no space in a house of worship.

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL & ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

In September 2021, the Cathedral announced that acclaimed artist Kerry James Marshall had agreed to reimagine this space. Marshall will design two new windows, and poet Elizabeth Alexander has signed on to pen poems overlaying the previous stone tablets. As artists adept at capturing the lived experience of Black Americans, they will add new and important iconography and reflect our aspiration to be a place where all Americans can see themselves and feel welcome. To follow this project, visit cathedral.org/windows

OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE: ST. JOHN’S CHAPEL

The kneelers in this chapel honor Americans from all walks of life: politicians and educators, scientists and artists, soldiers and healers. Individuals were selected in the mid–20th century to reflect people of national importance, those whose lives significantly influenced the course of American history and culture. The chairs to which these cushions are attached move around in the chapel and may not always be on view.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE was an educator, stateswoman, philanthropist, humanitarian and civil rights activist of significant influence; she founded Bethune-Cookman College.

SOJOURNER TRUTH is recognized as the first African American woman to publicly speak out against slavery. She also served as a nurse at Freedman’s Hospital/Howard University Hospital.

HARRIET TUBMAN escaped slavery herself and later returned to lead hundreds of enslaved people to freedom as a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Educator and intellectual BOOKER T. WASHINGTON founded Tuskegee University. He advised Presidents Roosevelt and Taft and was an influential speaker.

A LASTING LEGACY: HOWARD THURMAN

A statue of HOWARD THURMAN stands in a place of honor to the right of the High Altar, above seats for service participants. His theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists and he was a key mentor to its leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr.

REMAINING AWAKE: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. delivered his final Sunday sermon, “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution,” from our Canterbury Pulpit just days before his assassination. In this sermon Dr. King reminded the world, “the arc of a moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” A carving of Dr. King in the Canterbury Pulpit in the north covered arcade commemorates this event.