

## SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

FEBRUARY 24, 2022

Meet Louise Cecilia “Lulu” Fleming (1862-1899). Louise was born into slavery near Iberia, Florida. Her mother was half Congo and her father was half white. While she was still young her father joined the Union Army and was killed in action. At the age of 15 Lulu came to faith in the Bethel Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. It was a church composed of hundreds of slaves and a few slave holders.

Following the Civil War the white members attempted to force the African members to leave. The matter was taken to court and the court ruled for the Africans, thereby forcing the white members to leave the property to the former slaves. After the Civil War all Southern Baptist Churches were segregated.

The American Baptist Churches sent missionaries into the South to aid the former slaves in many ways, one primary way being education. Lulu graduated from high school and became a teacher. She would later, with the help of the American Baptists graduate from Shaw University as the Valedictorian. Shaw University was the first historically Black university in the nation to open its doors to women.

In 1887 she went to the Congo as an educational missionary. It was in 1891 that she returned to the States in order to be treated for poor health. Because of her own health experience she became more aware of the lack of health care available to people in the Congo. Again, with the help of American Baptists, she was able to enroll in the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia where she became the first African American to graduate in 1895.

Lulu returned to Africa and became the only African-American woman doctor in the country. She provided medical care to a large geographic area. The work was at times overwhelming. Not only was she providing medical care, she was training young men and women in the skills necessary to treat the ill and the injured. Tragically, she became infected with the parasite that causes African Sleeping Sickness. She returned to Philadelphia to seek treatment. Fleming died on June 20, 1899 at the Samaritan Hospital in Philadelphia.

*God, strengthen us to be faithful even when circumstances seem overwhelming.  
Amen. Pastor Louise*