

February
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Restoring Our Legacy

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First Episcopal District Bible Study

The Year of RESTORATION

Key Verse:

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

Study Passage:

Matthew 20:20-28

THE RECKONING



February is Black History Month. In this month we are encouraged to remember the lives and legacies of our ancestors. Richard Allen, Sarah Allen, Absalom Jones, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King lived lives that shaped the nation and the world. We pay them homage because of their contribution. Out of a profound sense of purpose, these men and women overcame numerous

obstacles to lead people to freedom and prosperity. We are beneficiaries of the hard work and the heavy lifting they have done for us.

Studying the lives of those who have come before naturally raises certain questions like: how do I want to be remembered? What thing of substance am I or we leaving behind? Our theme challenges us to consider these questions as individuals and as a church. When we are gone how will family, friends, or even a community remember us? What are we leaving behind that will help generations remember our contributions? Have we even done anything worth remembering?

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. deals with the question of legacy in his acclaimed sermon, “The Drum Major Instinct.” King’s sermon reflects on the unusual request of James’ and John’s mother on their behalf. She asks that Jesus allow James and John to sit on Jesus’ right and left hand at the judgment thrown. King’s sermon calls the nation to seek humble

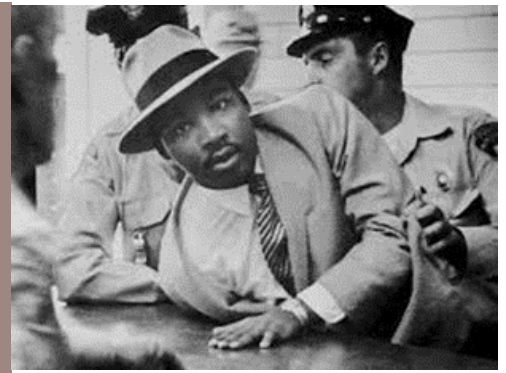


THE RECKONING *(continued)*

servanthood over acclaim and top position. At the conclusion of his sermon, King discusses the end of his own life declaring, “I won’t have any money to leave behind. I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of this life to leave behind. I just want to leave a committed life behind.”¹

In this season of social and political struggle, there is a call to “do justice” in our society. The church has a unique opportunity to lend a voice as well as bodies to the cause of setting free the captive, moral reclamation of lost values, compassionate confrontation of evil and winning back the soul of a nation. Will we be found wanting when history evaluates our effectiveness in ministry and impact on the present age?

1. Martin Luther King Jr. , “The Drum Major Instinct.” The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/drum-major-instinct-sermon-delivered-ebenezer-baptist-church>.



RECLAMATION

God wants the church to leave a legacy of service.



RECOVERY

Matthew 20 is part of the “travel narrative” of Jesus ministry as he makes his way to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is Jesus’ final destination as it is the setting of his passion and death. With Jerusalem in the horizon, suffering and death are a dominant theme. In the verses that precede our study passage (Matthew 20:17-19), Jesus predicts his death for a third time. Raymond E. Brown says that Matthew 20:17-19 “constitutes a paradoxical consideration of the role of suffering in victory.”² This is to say that Jesus sees his suffering as having a redemptive end, thus he willingly and confidently moves toward Jerusalem and his death.

His movement toward the ultimate sacrifice is made even more real through his lesson on greatness. The scene with the “Sons of Zebedee” and their mother is an invitation for James and John to understand the proper position of a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus reminds James and John of the cup of suffering which Jesus himself will soon drink. If James and John are to ascend to the heights that they seek, they must open themselves to be “suffering servants.”

The inheritance of Jesus Christ is that of suffering. The call to suffer is for the sake of those burdened by the power of sin and of oppression. The greatest of servants is the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus turns power and prestige on its head, Just like Martin Luther King and others who follow Jesus’



RECOVERY (continued)

footsteps. They realized that when this life is over no one will care about the power and laurels one accumulates, but how one made a difference in the world.

We are called by Christ to be the *diakonai*, from which we derive the word deacon, an order of ministry oriented to service. We have ordained deacons in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Though all who call themselves Christians will not take holy orders, Martin King reminds us that “...everybody can serve. all we need is a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.”³ The way of Christ has always moved toward this goal of service over self.

2. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 195.

3 Martin King, “The Drum Major Instinct.”

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

²¹ “What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

²² “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered.

²³ Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

²⁴ When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

RECONSTRUCTION

1. Discuss why James and John’s mother is the one who requested that her son gain position on Jesus’ left and right? Why didn’t they ask themselves?
2. What are we “asking” for when we accept Jesus Christ as our leader?
3. What parallels can be gleaned from Jesus’ ideas about greatness and the servant song in Isaiah 53, where our key verse is found? (Read Isaiah 53)
4. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet he leans always toward humility. What implications do his actions have on the way of discipleship?
5. Why were the other disciples angry?



Mahalia Jackson singing at the March on Washington in 1963

RENEWAL

If I can help somebody,
As I pass along
If I can cheer somebody,
With a word or song
If I can show somebody,
That he's travelling wrong
Then my living shall not be in vain.

If I can do my duty,
As a good man ought
If I can bring back beauty,
To a world up wrought
If I can spread love's message,
As the Master taught
Then my living shall not be in vain.

Chorus:
My living shall not be in vain
Then my living shall not be in vain
If I can help somebody, as I pass along
Then my living shall not be in vain.

REVIVAL

God's people are saved to serve. Let this prayer from Martin Luther King, Jr. guide the work we do to help the world around us:

O thou Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being. We humbly confess that we have not loved thee with our hearts, souls and minds and we have not loved our neighbors as Christ loved us. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive, we love our friends and hate our enemies, we go the first mile but dare not travel the second, we forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against thee. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know thy will. Give us the courage to do thy will. Give us the devotion to love thy will. In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.⁴

4. Martin Luther King Jr. "Pastoral Prayer." <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/prayers>.

