

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
St. Luke 6:27-36  
January 19th, 2020  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

### **Martin, We Need Your Message!**

I remember Dr. King because he inspired me to go into the ministry, at a time when our country was falling apart, when the economy was in real trouble. There were long gas lines; a much-disputed war across the seas and the President was being impeached. Martin was my model, though I have not always followed his example as well as I might or as well as he did. He is a saint. I am a sinner.

Why remember Martin Luther King? He died more than half a century ago. That was then, and this is now. Along with Mahatma Gandhi, he will be one of the most remembered figures of the twentieth century, though he never held public office or pastored a prestigious church, nor had a televangelist show on TV. Many, if not most of us, get a day off tomorrow. There will be sales in the stores. There will be a film recollection or two. He is fading into the pages of history now. There will be a bell ringing ceremony tomorrow at the State Capitol. O.K., but why remember him?

...Because he is an excellent example of the Christian Life. Why remember him? Because he gave his life in service to others when he might have done otherwise. With his academic credentials, he might have taught in a Divinity School. He might have pastored a large church with a prestigious name and history up in the North. He could very easily have led an easier life than the one he chose. But he humbly chose a path of service not unlike his God.

Martin heard the call of the spirit and answered it.

### **Non Violence**

While many were angry about the unjust treatment of African Americans across the country, an anger that was both deserved and ready to boil over, King chose a path of non-violence, much like Jesus and Gandhi before him. Jesus taught that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. The life of Jesus is an example of how love triumphs over hatred, how love transforms your enemies and overpowers the hatred. Love ultimate wins the day. Martin studied this and applied it earnestly to his ministry. The power of non-violence won the hearts of Americans who witnessed it at work. Hearts were changed by viewing the violence of bigotry and hatred up against the loving and peaceful demands for justice. No words of hate. No swords. No guns. No fires and no riots were called by him. Violence was the hallmark of the American urban 1960's. Non-violence is at the core of the work of Dr. King.

### **Speaker**

He was a powerful speaker, preacher and orator, perhaps the greatest of the twentieth century. His words will not long be forgotten. They are part of the fabric of our culture. His dream, though unrealized yet, is still a dream for our nation. His words, drawn from

both scripture and the African American Spiritual tradition and the American Historical tradition, (often calling forth the words of our founding documents) speak not only to one issue of civil rights, but to all aspects of human life. He was a great teacher.

### **Humility**

His life was an example of humility. Though he won dozens of awards including the Nobel Peace Prize, he did not rub that in anyone's face or cause himself to think he was superior to others. What mattered to Martin Luther King was the content of his character, and he was determined to reflect the character of Jesus in his life. He hung out with the powerful and the lowly. He shook hands with garbage collectors and walked and talked with them. He did the same with Presidents and religious and community leaders. He treated all the same. He lived in a humble home in a poor neighborhood with his family and with the people he served in his congregation. He might have lived anywhere in what he called a "nice home," but he also knew Jesus had no place at all to lay his head. He gave away the money he made from his Nobel Prize and his many books to charity. He pastored an inner-city church in Atlanta, Georgia, that at the time would be considered unremarkable and obscure were it not for his ministry there.

### **COURAGE**

He was a brave man facing down the hatred and violence of his era with his message of love, peace and non violence and standing up for justice for the least of these our brothers and sisters. His peaceful, non-violent actions made a difference, and he saw many of his objectives achieved during his lifetime. There was the voting rights act. The civil rights act. He gave his life ultimately for his beliefs walking into a place where people of color were hated and treated very unjustly, like their parents and grandparents before them who were brought to our shores from far away lands to work as slaves for an economy based on injustice, human tears and blood for the greed of a few people. He was jailed countless times for civil disobedience. He was beaten. He was stabbed by a would be assassin at a book signing. He could well have turned back at any point, but accepted his call to leadership of the non-violent civil rights movement.

### **FAITH**

He was a man of great faith whose faith gave him the courage to carry on with his ministry. He spoke of his mountaintop experience many times. It occurred at one very low point in his life when Klansmen tossed rocks at his house when he was home, as when in 1956 a white supremacist tossed a Molotov cocktail at the front of his house in Atlanta. To top off the evening he received an especially pernicious death threat on the phone that evening. He stood in his kitchen thinking he was alone and that he had had enough, and looking at a picture on the door of his refrigerator, the spirit of God surrounded him and told him that he was not alone and would be alright, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness, stand up for justice" and Martin said, he saw the mountaintop at that moment. The night before he was martyred, in his last speech, he presciently said, "I have been to the mountaintop. I may not get there with you, but we as a people will get to the mountaintop." He was only 39 years old when he was slain by a white supremacist while working for justice for sanitation workers on a Motel Balcony in Memphis.

## **DREAM**

Has his dream been realized? How much have things changed today? American corporations now seek cheap labor overseas, leaving American workers unemployed or barely eking out a wage and living in poverty. The rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer. In 1993 at lunch with Jessie Jackson, he said that going forward, the real issue would not be limited to the plight of minorities, but the disappearance of the middle class. How prescient his comments were.

And with that has come first blame and then division in our society, exacerbated by the misplaced anger over the struggles of human life in our midst. Again we see the rise of racial and religious hatred and suspicions. We are blinded by the finger pointing and blame that is misplaced and misdirected.

Trust me, that only the words of Jesus tell the truth here. Only those words lead to peace, progress and hope.

Never have we needed the message of Martin Luther King Preaching those words, more than we do today. AMEN