

**MLK Birmingham Community
Peace Service**
Pastor Scott Runyon
First Baptist Church of Birmingham
January 20, 2019

Welcome / Introduction

Before we get started, I wanted to let you know that this service is a community service and that makes it so is your presence and participation.

What is peace?

Peace includes but is much more than the absence of war and violence. Peace harmony and a state of well being. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace and holds a greater breath and depth than we often acknowledge when hearing the word “peace.” Shalom refers to a sense of harmony and well being among people and the environment. It refers to a wholeness and completeness of being that is in balance.

Peace is not a passive reality but requires action that can be uncomfortable and even unpopular. It calls us to live in a particular way that fosters harmony in our lives and world. To reflect in a small way this reality, I will be inviting you to participate in this service. We have a microphone set up front

and throughout the service I will invite you to get up from the comfort of your seat to come forward and read the various Martin Luther King Jr. quotes printed in the bulletin, and to light candles as you reflect on peace. I also may invite you to speak from your seat.

Today, we are a community with the common vision of peace, in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, whose legacy is one of non-violent protest in the face of world without peace. His life and words also made a bold statement that peace was possible in our communities and world, when people risk taking action and standing for a new reality.

Dr. King’s life was an example of one who stood in the face of no agreement, and continued to work inside the dream that fueled him — a dream where justice and peace were a reality. He was not talking about a shallow peace, but the kind of peace that could even reconcile people who once were enemies.

All people in this country, and indeed our world, owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. King and his mission.

He worked tirelessly for racial justice, because that was a

prominent need in the world in his generation, as it continues to be today. But his vision was bigger than the racial wall. His vision became a grand and realistic vision of the dignity and worth of all people. He spoke of the commitment and loyalty to peace that must transcend race, transcend tribe, transcend class, and transcend nationalism. In theory and practice, peace encompasses all people throughout the world. Dr. King said this was the only path to true and lasting peace.

Dr. King encouraged people to continue moving toward the goal of peace. Some of us have become complacent today thinking that there is nothing we can do, or that our efforts don't make a difference. Dr. King's words, spoken more than 50 years ago, are for us today. He said,

"We must keep going. If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. But by all means, keep moving."

So, we come together today to say that in the face of the difficult before us, we are committed to and resolved to walk the path of peace.

Let us pray...

Prayer For Peace

Dear God of Peace, you hold both heaven and earth in your hands. Let the design of your love penetrate our violent and hate-filled actions. Through your grace, give us the power to work along side you to bring peace to our homes, peace to our neighborhoods, peace to our communities, peace to our county, peace to our state, peace to our country, and peace to our world.

Responsive Affirmation Of Peace

Leader: This work of peace is hard. It is demanding and time consuming. But, it must be done. Will we recommit ourselves to working for peace and justice.

People: This work can sometimes be divisive, driving wedges between people. But, this work asks us to stick together.

Leader: This work for peace and justice is more effective when we embrace and respect how we are different.

People: This work requires creativity. It demands that we push ourselves to look for new possibilities and break out of the status quo.

Leader: This work for peace and justice requires faith and hope that a better tomorrow is possible. We dedicate ourselves to find sources of faith and hope in our lives.

People: This work for peace and justice needs inner peace. We commit ourselves to promoting peace both within and without.

Birmingham Community

Dr. King's vision has helped frame our service today, which begins right where we live — our own families and the neighbors on our street. This could be the Birmingham community, or the community where you live.

This is where we start.

There is strife in our homes between husbands, wives, and children. We know that this is a wealthy area, but there are families who don't have so much money but struggle to fit in by wearing a mask and displaying a facade of wealth. For some it becomes difficult to be fully authentic about who they are.

There is a lack of peace for youth as well. They experience pressure to excel, to succeed, to be perfect, and never fail. But failure is part of learning, and if there is no space to

fail, then some don't even try, and then are filled with feelings of pressure, inadequacy, and anxiety. These feelings are hidden.

Reading MLK quotes

Sharing

Song

Light A Candle For Peace

Oakland County Community

From our families and neighborhoods, we widen our gaze for peace to include the community that is Oakland County.

This county has a variety of services for those who face a pack of peace daily. We have South Oakland Shelter and Lighthouse, which recently announced a merger, serving people without a home and who are struggling to make ends meet. Many live in a perpetual state of unrest, but are helped by the South Oakland Shelter, who coordinates a place for them to stay 365 days each year, rotating from church to church.

Reading MLK quotes

Sharing

Song

Light A Candle For Peace

Michigan Community

Then, we open our hearts to those who consider the State of Michigan home. If we travel down Woodward, into Detroit we will find a door that alerts us to the need for peace. A stone's throw from the Ambassador Bridge, is the door of Freedom House Detroit that brings into the Michigan community people from all over the world whose lives have been rife with stress and persecution. Freedom House provides refuge and services for those seeking asylum from their home country, where they can no longer live safely. They seek peace and new opportunities, though they do not know the language, the culture, the people, or often even the language spoken here.

I want to share the story of Irving and Delilah (not their real names) who were living in fear for their safety in Uganda. In order to survive, they needed to escape the country. Irving sold his agricultural business and Delilah left behind a private medical practice, to purchase plane fare for the two of them and their three boys to New Jersey. They arrived and were

stranded in the airport until they found someone willing to let them make a call from their cell phone. Eventually, they got a ride to Freedom House in Detroit, where they could stay as a family, recover from the trauma of their homeland, gain their bearings, and find peace. It was from this foundation that they could then restart their lives one step at a time.

* Great Lakes, Aisan Carp

Reading MLK quotes

Sharing

Song

Light A Candle For Peace

United States Community

Beyond Michigan, we understand that we are connected as a community with all people of the United States of America.

In this country, however, we experience divisions, barriers, and walls that we have erected that keep us apart and fearful of one another. Certainly politics is one of those areas as we watch in the daily news cycle the government partial shutdown near one twelfth of the year. There seems to be a

widening gap between people rather than harmony and peace.

Throughout the country, there is hate and bullying acted out in the halls of our schools because of race, sexual orientation, or social class. We have mass shootings, tensions between police officers and communities especially around race, and religion

We live in a broken country that is in need of peace. Working for peace is difficult, but it is worthwhile. It requires our attention and energy.

Reading MLK quotes

Sharing

Song

Light A Candle For Peace

World Community

The reality is that in many countries that are torn by war and persecution, like Sudan, Myanmar, Syria, Afghanistan, and others, unlike Irving and Delilah, most people are unable to escape, so they live in constant unrest, turmoil and violence. Each day is the uncertain reality of life and death.

There is a great need for peace in our world.

In the late 1960s, it was the astronauts that gifted us with a vision of being one through a picture of the earth from space, where borders between countries were washed away.

Today's example is exemplified by DNA analysis from companies like ancestry.com, 23andMe, FamilyTree DNA, and others. These tools allow us to see our DNA heritage and connection with others we otherwise would certainly miss. Scott Moore, who is now the Moderator of this congregation is one such person.

On Christmas Eve, Scott received the results of a DNA test. Shortly afterward, Scott, who is very light skinned, found a fourth cousin named Jollen, from Memphis, Tennessee, who is very dark skinned and ancestors from west Africa. No-one was more surprised that Scott whose sense of family got a whole lot larger that day.

This is one way that people see themselves connected to all other people as homo sapiens, beyond religion, beyond creed, beyond color of skin, or language, beyond age and gender and sexual orientation. We literally are all connected and part of one another.

We always have been and always will be one.

Dr. King saw this and continued to declare that what separates us pales in comparison to what binds us together as people. When we get this and truly own it and internalize it, peace can have a chance to form out of international policies and relationships.

Reading MLK quotes

Sharing

Song

Light A Candle For Peace

Hope For A Future Of Peace

Peace will require something of each of us. The actions we must take in this journey will be varied, but all of them must be grounded in a spirit of love. Love must infuse our actions.

Dr. King, in one of his famous speeches called “Loving Your Enemies” had him reflect on the words of Jesus,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you,

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

In that sermon Dr. King offered three practical things people can do to love their enemies. I would say these also apply to building peace.

First, he said that we need to develop the capacity to forgive. This action is taken by those who have been wronged. We cannot love our enemies without forgiveness.

Secondly, he said that we need to recognize that those we think of as enemies, those who are actively working to do us harm are much more than evil, but there is good in them as well. He said, “This simply means that there is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us.”

Thirdly, to bring love and peace, Dr. King emphasized that we must not seek to defeat or humiliate the enemy, but seek to win their friendship and understanding. He understood that when violence is acted against violence, it only breeds more evil and destruction in the world, and we must break that cycle.

May we each reflect, pray, contemplate, and share with one another about what it will take for

us to bring peace to our homes,
communities, county, state,
country and the whole world.

MLK quote

Song

Announcements:

Offering plates at the exits

Closing Blessing

May the unswerving spirit of peace,
that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived,
also fill you and empower you to
live afresh the love that builds a
new world of peace.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to
peace as we pursue justice, hope,
and love for all people.

And what does God require of us,
but to do justice, and to love
kindness, and to walk humbly with
our God?

May the grace and love and peace
of God be with you all today and
forevermore. Amen!