

**MLK Birmingham Community  
Peace Service (2nd Annual)**  
Pastor Scott Runyon  
First Baptist Church Birmingham  
January 19, 2020

**Welcome / Introduction**

This is a community service which means that your presence and participation is important. Throughout the service, I will invite some of you to volunteer to come forward to the microphone and read the various Martin Luther King Jr. quotes that are found in the program. I will also invite all of you four different times to come forward to light candles for peace related to the four areas represented on the four tables in front of you.

What is peace?

Peace is the absence of war and violence, but it is also so much more. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace and holds a greater breadth and depth of meaning that we typically think. It refers to a sense of harmony, balance, and well being within a person, between people, and between people and the environment. It refers to a wholeness and completeness of being.

Peace is not a passive reality, but often involves action that can be uncomfortable and unpopular. Commitment to peace calls us to live in a particular way that fosters harmony in our lives and in the world.

Though some of you may be strangers, those of us who are here this morning 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 no agreement in a world in need of peace.

His life and words made a bold statement that peace is possible when people risk taking action and take a stand for a new kind of reality that includes shalom.

Dr. King, who stands firmly in the history of American Baptist pastors, worked diligently inside the dream that fueled him — a dream where justice and peace were a lived reality. This was not 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

dramatic need in the world in his generation, as it continues to be in ours. But his vision was bigger than the racial wall.

Dr. King's vision became a grand and realistic vision honoring the dignity and worth of all people. He spoke of the commitment and loyalty to peace that must transcend race, tribe, class, and nationalism, which is a distinct challenge in an election year.

In theory as well as practice, his vision of peace encompasses all people throughout the world. Dr. King said this work is 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 toward peace don't make a significant difference.

However, all worthwhile change begins with a person willing to take action behind a vision. Dr. King's words, spoken more than 50 years ago, help us today to recommit ourselves to keep moving toward peace in our families, community and world one step at a time. 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 difficulties before us such as racially motivated violence, divisive political speech, turmoil in families, discrimination in the workplace, and wars between various groups, teams, and tribes, we are committed to and resolved to, like Martin Luther King Jr, keep moving in the direction 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 world, including our actions, thoughts and feelings. Through your grace, give us the power to work along side you to bring peace to the public places in which we dwell together, in the places where we work, in the relationships we have with family others, and in the tension-filled political realms of this country and world. May you give us each an inward integrity of peace that will sustain us and ground us when we face all threats of violence and unrest. Amen.

## **Responsive Affirmation Of Peace**

Leader: The work of peace and justice is hard. It is demanding and time consuming. But, it must be done. Will we commit ourselves today to work for peace and justice?

**People: We will commit ourselves to peace and justice. Knowing that this work can sometimes divide people, we also commit to stick together to see it done.**

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

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

Leader: This work of 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 of peace and justice requires inner peace and strength. We commit ourselves to promote peace both inside ourselves and in the world.**

## **Public / Civic Peace**

### **Reflection**

Dr. King's vision of peace has helped frame our service today, which begins in the public / civic arena — the public places in which we move and engage with those in our neighborhoods and community, the stores we visit, the organizations with which we partner or volunteer, and the streets we walk in this Birmingham community or the communities where you live.

The public / civic arena includes those who make laws that impact the day to day lives we live at the local, state, and national level.

Today, we stand for peace, justice, and harmony as the foundations of life in these the public spaces. We stand for peace to be part of the framework used by those who are in positions to determine how our lives work. This includes politicians and other elected and appointed public officials who are given the authority to determine the legal framework for society.

These people are tasked with representing us, the people, but they are the ones who determine the laws that govern such things as immigration policy, which has tragically left children separated from their parents, not just along

the southern border, but throughout the United States. This now strikes closer to home because four kids from this congregation have been without their dad since January 3rd — their dad who alone was raising them.

This is injustice!

Today we stand for peace and justice for Jose and his kids, as well as all immigrants, refugees, dreamers, and asylum seekers.

The public / civic arena also includes our responsibility to carry the principles of peace and justice with us as we engage with others in framing a just society that works for all people.

This is where we start, because this is a bedrock foundation for peace and justice in our communities and world.

Let's reflect on the need for peace in the public / civic arena where too often violence and fear has dominated.

### **Reading MLK quotes**

*"Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones. Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding: it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather*

*than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers."* -MLK

*"True peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice."* -MLK

## **"O God Of Every Nation"**

### **Light A Candle For Peace**

### **Workplace Peace**

#### **Reflection**

Some of us here, and others we know, work in environments that do not feed the soul. Beyond this, some workplaces are filled with discrimination, harassment and abuse. A handful of the many situations like this have been displayed in recent news reports highlighting workplace predators like Harvey Weinstein and Roger Ailes, who was depicted in the current movie Bombshell. Many others have been brought to light by people who are now speaking out for justice inside the "Me Too" movement.

The sad reality is that some people remain silent and put up with harsh, unjust, and abusive work environments because they fear it will jeopardize their job and put at

risk the financial security of their family.

While this is understandable, it is not justice.

Justice would have everyone's dignity and worth honored and respected in the workplace. It would have every person feel safe that they are not the target of violence or discrimination. It would have everyone's voice heard.

Probably every workplace includes people with differing ideas. But when justice and peace reigns in the workplace, there is the space for civil dialogue and respect among those who are different. Peace calls us back to recognize that our common humanity runs deeper than our differences.

Let's reflect on the need for peace in the workplace.

### **Reading MLK quotes**

*"Peace doesn't mean a dearth of conflicts; dissimilarities will always be present. Peace denotes solving such issues through peaceful means; through education, dialogue, knowledge; and through humane manners." -MLK*

*"One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means." -MLK*

## **"Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace"**

### **Light A Candle For Peace**

### **Relationships / Family Peace**

#### **Reflection**

As we sit here today, there is strife in our homes between husbands, wives, and children. We know that this geographic area is generally quite wealthy, but there are families here who don't have so much money and 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 truly are.

There is a lack of peace for youth as well. They experience pressure to excel, to succeed, to be perfect, and never fail. We know that failure is part of learning, and if there is no space to fail, then some don't even try, and then they hide, filled with feelings of pressure, inadequacy, and anxiety — a lack of peace!

Our families are in need of peace, a foundation on which they can grow in love, generosity and from which they can be a contribution to others.

We also need peace in our relationships with others. Everyone in this room can attest to the fact

that our country is being fractured along political party lines. Not only are families being split, but people who used to be friends seem no longer able to speak to one another because they identify on separate side of the chasm that is the political party divide.

We also live in a time when parents disown their own biological children because they have come out as gay or lesbian, or transgender. These individuals who have come out are not protected in many places from being fired from their job based on their sexual orientation or identification and made to live in fear because they are not considered by some as valuable as human beings.

This is a sign that we need a revolution of mind and heart. We need peace and justice in our relationships with our neighbors and fellow community members.

Let's reflect on the need for peace in our families and relationships.

### **Reading MLK quotes**

*"Peace doesn't rest in the covenants and charters alone. It lies in the minds and hearts of all individuals. So allow us not to rest all our hopes on paper and on parchment, allow us struggle to build peace, a wish for peace, an enthusiasm to work for peace in the minds and hearts of all of our individuals. I believe that we can do so. I believe the*

*issues of human fate are not further than the reach of human beings."* -MLK

*"If you desire to make peace with your opponent, you must work with them. Your enemy becomes your partner."* -MLK

## **"Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands"**

### **Light A Candle For Peace**

### **Personal / Spiritual Peace**

#### **Reflection**

There are many places in which we need peace today. The final one we will lift up today is the peace needed inside each of us. There is a need for peace in the personal inner spiritual space deep in our soul. When we find peace here, it leads us to know that we are okay and we will make it through no matter what kind of challenge we face.

With an inner spiritual peace we can weather the current storms and those that are sure to come. We can stand on the foundation of knowing we were made good in God's love. We can know that no matter how we fall short and how we continue to fail time and again, that we are not only forgiven, but we can grow stronger through getting up and going on.

With God-given inner spiritual peace we gain the courage to stand up and speak truth to power. We draw upon the strength to stand up for someone whose voice has been stolen by injustice.

We are reminded that all people are connected, part of the same stuff, and at our core good. So, injustice for one is truly injustice for all, and conversely, justice for one is truly justice for all. So, with inner spiritual peace we are not alone, but find the goodness that runs through all our veins, and we stand for and with many others in the hope for a world and a community where peace and justice are a reality for all people.

Let's reflect on the need for personal / spiritual peace.

### **Reading MLK quotes**

*"Peace originates from being capable of contributing the best that you have, and all that you are, toward making a world that supports all. But it's also securing the space for others to put in the best of all that they are and they have." -MLK*

*"One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means." -MLK*

### **"Song Of Hope" (Robert Hobby)**

### **"Go Now In Peace"**

## **Light A Candle For Peace**

### **Hope For A Future Of Peace**

#### **Reflection**

True peace will require something from each of us. We might all take different actions toward peace on this journey of life, but all of them must be grounded in a spirit of love. Love must infuse and give purpose to our actions.

In one of his famous speeches "Loving Your Enemies," Dr. King reflected 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 fostering peace and justice in our communities and world.

First, he said that we need to develop the capacity to forgive. Forgiveness is given by those who have been wronged. Dr. King reminded us that 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 merely evil — 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 stressed that we must not seek to defeat or humiliate the enemy, but seek to win their friendship and understanding. He keenly illustrates that when violence is used to combat violence, it only breeds more evil, destruction and more violence, and everyone loses. Instead, we must break that cycle and return violence with love and forgiveness.

Let us reflect, pray, contemplate, and share with one another about what it will take for us to bring peace to our public / civic spaces, our workplaces, our families and relationships, and our own personal inner spiritual experience.

And may we stand with hope that peace yet can reign in this world.

### **MLK quote**

*“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that the unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”*

-MLK

## **“Go Now In Peace”**

### **Announcements:**

- Offering plates at the exits
- Buy tickets after worship to the Annual Meeting Dinner (next week)

### **Closing Blessing**

May the unswerving spirit of peace that Dr. King lived also fill you and empower you to build a new world with a foundation of love and peace.

May you reaffirm your commitment to peace as you pursue justice, hope, and love for all people.

And what does God require of us? But to do justice, 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 every day. Amen!