

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Feast of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., April 8, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Christian Dream"
Genesis 37:17b-20, Ephesians 6:10-20, Luke 6:27-36

this past Wednesday was the 50th anniversary of the death of The Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr; that's why we are using the special Collect of the Day and readings designated for it; but even in the regular readings we would have had today, there is a strong message that lends itself to thinking about Dr King; today's regular readings recognize that the ideals of racial and economic reconciliation are so central to Jesus' message of Good News, that you will hear them in any given Sunday's readings

what we would have used today for the 2nd Sunday After Easter, the Collect prays that we "may show forth in [our] lives what [we] profess by [our] faith"—a reminder that what we affirm in our worship and belief we must live out, outside of church, and try to influence the world in that direction; Acts Ch. 4 describes how the early Christians looked after each other, so that "there was not a needy person among them"—a reminder that in terms of the church as the body of Christ, we must recognize that any hurt or any injustice anywhere in the body hurts the whole body and causes the whole body to suffer; Psalm 133 states "Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity"—a reminder that it is not good, and not God's will, when people fail to live in unity; and 1st John Ch. 1 says that "if we walk in the light" of Christ we must "have fellowship with one another," and "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves"—a reminder that all of us play a part in the systems in our nation which perpetuate poverty, inequality, and injustice

the special readings for Dr Martin Luther King's commemoration are even more to the point; Genesis reminds us of the troublemaker Joseph who, like King, had dreams that made people want to kill him; Luke's Gospel reminds us that Jesus himself originated the teachings of nonviolence that King put to use; and Ephesians reminds us that in any fight against evil, one has to take up the whole armor of God for protection

some people may think that the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, or of today, was, and is, only a social movement, or a cultural movement, or a political movement; but it is more than anything else a religious movement;

some people may think of King only as an activist, and many people leave out “The Rev.” and the “Dr.” when referring to King, but it was because of his ordination as a Baptist minister, his deep study of the Bible, and his PhD in theology that led him to be so eloquent in his words and so involved in his ministry in changing the world, to try and bring our nation closer to God’s vision of what it should be

I cannot think of any other individual who has risen to the status of being a preacher for our entire nation, the way King was; Billy Graham was certainly well-known and influential, but Graham did not leave us the kind of words, the kind of vision, or the kind of dream for a better America that King did; Graham wanted people to become Christians; King wanted Christians to put their faith into action

King’s words reverberate to this day, largely because they were not just speeches, they were sermons; many of his words were straightforward Bible quotes, highlighted for their bearing upon our condition: “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream” (Amos 5); others were paraphrases that developed from Bible quotes: “the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor” (Isaiah 61 and Luke 4); and some of them were not Biblical words but grew out of the Biblical mindset: “If one is truly devoted to the religion of Jesus, he will seek to rid the earth of social evils; the gospel is social as well as personal”

looking back at how Paul wrote in our Ephesians reading today about how one has to continue, each day, in the process of preparing ourselves to be active and engaged Christians, I am reminded of a practice that Dr King insisted upon; as early as 1963 he had developed a “Commitment Card” that all of those who would march or demonstrate with him had to sign and turn in; it is a kind of 10 Commandments

here is what it included; signers affirmed that they would: 1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus; 2. Remember always that the non-violent movement seeks justice and reconciliation-not victory; 3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love; 4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all might be free; 5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all might be free; 6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy; 7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world; 8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart; 9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily

health; 10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration; notice how all but the 10th of these commitments are not instructions about how to march, but in a far larger sense, are instructions about how to live out one's life as an engaged Christian; they are instructions each of us, as Christians, can commit ourselves to

The Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr's "I have a dream" speech, sermon, drew heavily from Isaiah 40: "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh will see it together;" this is not just King's dream, it is God's dream; this is the same dream that Jesus brought back to life on Easter morning, so it is every Christian's dream; I invite us all to take this dream to heart and to make it our own; I pray that all of us, as individuals, as families, and as a parish, will show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith