

Excerpts From the last speech of The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1968.

If I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?"

I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the 20th century, I will be happy."

Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up.

The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around.

But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.

And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it is nonviolence or nonexistence.

if something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed.

I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding.

What's beautiful to me is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel.

The preacher must be an Amos, and saith, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."

The preacher must say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me," and he's anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be.

We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.

I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain.

I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land.

I may not get there with you. But I want you to know that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

In September of 1963 MLK spoke at the funeral of the young girls who were blown up by a bomb as they attended Sunday School at the 16<sup>th</sup> street Baptist church in Birmingham AL... I have been in that church... I have stood in that pulpit, it is haunting....

*They say to each of us black and white alike that we must substitute courage for caution.*

*They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murders.*

*Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American dream.*

We end our season of epiphany and hear again the story of the transfiguration of Jesus...that fantasy like story with Moses, Elisha, Jesus and three of his friends... Peter and James and John, and the transformation of Jesus into dazzling white and the voice of God once again confirming God's relationship with Jesus and instructing the disciples to listen to him.

*It is as strange a scene as there is in the Gospels. Even without the voice from the cloud to explain it, they had no doubt what they were witnessing.*

*It was Jesus all right, the man they'd tramped many a dusty mile with, whose mother and brothers they knew, the one they'd seen as hungry, tired, and footsore as the rest of them.*

*It was the holiness of the man shining through his humanness, his face so afire with it they were almost blinded. **Fredrich Buechner***

In the midst of Black History month, the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Selma, and the recent tragic experiences in Minneapolis, Atlanta, Washington DC we must ask ourselves, this white privileged community, some challenging questions.

Have we done all that we can to move the arc of history toward justice?

Have we been the prophetic Gospel voice that stands up to war and all forms of violence....in the face of extinction as a country and as a species?

Have we personally and as a community of faith made every effort to end systemic racism, now, not in some distant future.

As we prepare for Lent, Ash Wednesday is this week, we will be challenged:

to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance.  
to make a right beginning  
by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word....

This lent we will read together Howard Thurman's classic book *Jesus and the Disinherited*.

*American Christianity has betrayed the religion of Jesus almost beyond redemption. Churches have been established for the underprivileged, for the weak, for the poor, on the theory that they prefer to be among themselves..*

*Thurman, Howard. Jesus and the Disinherited (p. 98). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.*

Thurman's point is that the one place where we would expect a community where one's relations with God is more important than class, race, wealth, or status has instead become a major contributor for guaranteeing barriers.

We have allowed ourselves to be willfully blind to the emergence of a caste system— a system of social excommunication that has denied millions of African Americans and all non-white peoples basic human dignity.

*We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside, but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even.*

*Many people may rightly say, "I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves." And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.*

*Wilkerson, Isabel. Caste*

Brown, Kelly Douglas. Stand Your Ground

Introduce Video

I cannot imagine what MLK's experience might have been when he spoke of the mountaintop, and that he had seen the promised land, any more than I can imagine what Peter, James or John were thinking when they say Jesus transfigured and heard the voice of God...

What I do understand is that the work we are called to accomplish in our Baptismal Covenant is not complete... the harvest is plentiful, and the workers are few. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is among you."

Jesus teaches us, it is the other, the Samaritan, the immigrant, the woman at the well, the poor, that stops to provide care for the victim along the side of the road.

It is Jesus who tells us to put our swords back into its place, that those who live by the sword will perish by the sword.

God, help us to love one another as you have loved us...help us to love those that are different from us in race, or religion, or language...

God, help us to put down our weapons, and help us to end our addiction to violence.

God help us to love the terrorists that attempted to destroy our capital and our democracy.

MLK preaches that the kingdom of heaven among us is only possible when we solve our fundamental sins of racism, poverty and violence.

Too often we have rushed in to provide so called opportunity for people of color within our broken political and economic structure as it is, as if it were their responsibility to fix our systemic problems.

We are not called upon to recreate a Garden of Eden to which we can all seek to retire. we are called upon to be peacemakers together in the struggle for a just world.

As Bishop Tutu comments

I don't preach a social gospel; I preach the Gospel.... when people were hungry Jesus did not say now is this political or social, he said I feed you, because the good news to a hungry person is bread.

Are we willing and ready to move forward from our time in the wilderness of Covid, to take with us that we have learned about ourselves and our time in history, and to leave behind that which will not sustain us in the future?

Are we willing to decrease our white and class privilege to repair a millennium of white privilege, 500 years of the sins of discovery and 400 years of the sin of slavery?

Are we willing to speak the truth of the Gospel in love to those whom we fundamentally disagree with in our country and find a common way that is consistent with the Way of Love and our Baptismal Covenant?

Are we prepared for our own transfiguration on our own Sacred Mountain?

Are we prepared to rebuild our inherited broken homes?

“We are structured and cultured for a world that does not exist any more” (Craig Loya)

As Bishop Loya commented, we need more jazz such as Coltrane’s Love Supreme, and perhaps less classical music.

The church began as a transformative encounter with Jesus that changed people’s lives...

People reflected the love and power of God’s Holy Spirit.

We are called to return our focus to the practice of a Spirit-led transformation, and yes with God’s help a transfiguration.

The Reverend Rex McKee

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