

**In the name of God, who speaks to us even now.** This morning, we honor the memory of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior, whose birthday is a national holiday. He was a brilliant writer and orator, and a formidable organizer. He could simultaneously radiate hope and urgency.

Rather than summing everything up after hearing today's readings, I am going to introduce each one, hoping that you will listen even more deeply. Notice what strikes you about each one. Each reading is paired by our musical sommelier Chad Smith. I will be inviting you to turn and talk briefly after each pair of reading and song, so yeah, you're going to talk during the service. It's okay!

Our first pairing is Dr. King and *Free At Last*. We're going to start with Rev. King, speaking at the Lincoln Memorial, with the melancholy Mr. Lincoln sitting in the shadowy temple behind him, trousers and long coat hanging loosely on his thin frame, and his sad, dignified face regarding King and the 250,000 Americans beyond him.

President Kennedy had asked King and his colleagues not to come to Washington. Senator Thurmond as well as the FBI declared that the March for Jobs and Freedom was, in fact, a Communist event.

You've doubtless heard a recording of this speech. His words are historic. The theme is urgency. *Now* is the time to end the poll tax. To pass the voting rights act. To promote dignified jobs. As you listen, see how you react to this urgency: do you feel depressed that so little has changed? Are you thrilled to imagine a day when we can join hands again? Do you thank God as you listen, for our precious freedoms?

After the reading, we're going to sing the old spiritual Dr. King quotes. It's the story of a young man hearing two voices in his head. One voice is Satan, telling him he is too young to pray. And the other voice urges him to sing, to declare that, thanks to God, he is free at last. Not that he's going to be free someday, maybe in heaven, but right now. Even if you are self-conscious about singing along with your computer, try it!

But, okay, if that feels too weird, at least *imagine* yourself singing this, because maybe you are

- at the end of the Underground Railroad,
- or at the end of the pandemic
- or you are lining up to vote for the first time,
- or checking out of treatment,

- or walking out of jail,
- or realizing that whatever has been keeping you stuck no longer has power over you like some devilish voice in your head, and so you sing Free at Last, Free at Last, thank God almighty I'm free at last. Sing with that great moment in mind and afterward I'll give you a minute to turn to the people with you and tell what your free at last moment was.

**Introduction to the Second Reading.** What was your *free at last* moment? Did you sing along with us? Or imagine a situation of being freed from something, someone, someplace that has been holding you captive? Take a minute and share.

The second reading is from Desmond Tutu, a tiny giant with an infectious laugh. The Archbishop of Cape Town. The fighter for apartheid who later became the fighter against the appalling corruption and anti-science policies of South Africa's government. You will hear a simple argument: that since we are all made in God's image, we are meant to treat one another like family. To really *see* each other and *listen* to them tell their story. Not just to exchange weapons for constructive tools, but to turn swords into plows. So I invite you again to listen for God's good word here, spoken by the beloved man who died last month, and see what comes up for you.

After Archbishop Tutu's speech, we will sing another spiritual, this one very personal. We're singing the part of a friend, a fellow family member, maybe, telling someone we love a very difficult truth: *someone's knocking on your door, sinner*. Not "sinner" in a condemning way, but in a way that says: *hey, brother, we all mess up, and it's time to pay attention! Because this door knock can really help you*. And once again, even if it is embarrassing to sing to your computer, close your eyes and imagine you're here with us! And as you listen to Tutu and then sing this song, can you picture some people who you could treat more like family, with God's help?

**Introduction to the third reading.** Ok, Jesus is knocking on our doors, hoping to be welcomed like a brother. Tutu said we are all family. Take a minute to share:

who could you treat more like family, so Tutu's words come to life? Whose door do you maybe need to knock on?

Our third reading is by the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, raised by a single mom in Kentucky and now a member of our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's team of visionary evangelists, she pictures an active, dancing church so involved in changing the world that people are advised to wear crash helmets, not Sunday hats. It's hard for me to imagine, living in my comfortable house a couple of blocks around the corner from this comfortable church. I don't work in an emergency room sending people back home because there are no beds left. I haven't lost my job because the restaurant where I work has closed. People don't look suspiciously at my skin when I enter their store. Police don't pull me over with their weapons drawn. I get welcomed when I enter the hardware store, when I check in at a hotel, or when I visit a church. But the thing about all this racial justice work that I am slowly getting into my head is that most of the time as an older white guy, I'm just supposed to listen. To just listen. And maybe a couple of times a week I hear a little voice telling me something I can do to be a brother. A lover of souls.

For our song response, we have *Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart*. Echoing Canon Spellers' words, we'll sing about how actually being like Christ is so hard and yet so right. How it's a matter of heart, not head. Think about some small way in which your heart is turning in the right direction, and we'll share again. But first, the reading.

**Introduction to the Gospel.** So did you feel some hope? In listening to Stephanie Spellers' Black, Female voice, talking about experiences maybe you've never had, did you feel guilty? Bored? Bothered? Hopeless? Or maybe encouraged that this next generation is going to take us to a better place? Or did the song make you think about something? Take a minute to talk to the people you're with.

Our final reading is, as always, from the Good News of Christ. Normally this year, we hear from Luke, but today it's Matthew. If ever there was a guy whose door needed knocking on, it was him. If ever there was a guy who didn't treat others like family, or who was dedicated to taking away people's money and freedom, it was the tax collector. Jesus invited himself to Matthew's house (he was also called Levi) for dinner. Matthew was hated by his fellow Jews for collaborating with the Romans. He was branded an unforgivable sinner, unclean and disgusting, by his

religion. Jesus told him he was a child of God and didn't have to keep doing this nasty work of extorting money.

Matthew took the chance. He gave up his ill-gotten wealth and spent the rest of his life persuading other people that Jesus' answer – love – was more powerful than any get-rich scheme. Jesus had just finished silencing one group of critics, and an opposing group showed up with more questions for him. But he was not interested in debating. He simply said: the most important goal is to love with your whole self.

Listen as Rex reads these words which none of us will live up to in our lifetime; but the effort we make to do what Jesus teaches, day after day, is the most important thing we can do.

My sermon's done now. We'll sit quietly after the Gospel, and then

{9:00 we will sing this inspiring version of our Creed. I love how the music builds with the words toward the end *and in the power of the Spirit of **Love** and in the company of the **faithful** so to be the **church***. When I sing this one, I don't wonder why I come here anyway, even if it has to be online }

{11:15: we'll recite, and maybe even pay attention to, the Nicene Creed, written in the fourth century as an exercise in unity. *We might speak different languages and be male or female, Greek or Roman or even barbarian, slave or free, but this is the Holy One we rest our hearts on.* }

Here's my brother, Rex McKee, reading from our wise and grateful ancestor Matthew, the former object of hatred, who was rescued. By love.