

Discipleship Moment

Remembering a King

While I was growing up our church was large (one of the largest in the community). Lawrence is about 25 miles outside of the Kansas City metro area and houses the University of Kansas. Each year our church hosted the Kansas City area Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Gospel celebration. Our church, which was overwhelmingly white would be flooded by black musicians, pastors, and community leaders and it was a joy to join these leaders as we, together, celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. My family would be involved and every year I would sing in the children's gospel choir. Not only was I one of only a few white children in the choir, but you could tell it was me because I was one of the few children unable to clap on beat.

One year, in high school, I was helping out with some of the planning and execution of that year's celebration. While at a breakfast with some of the committee and community members I spotted a mixed-family. A black mother with a white husband, they had a young child with them. This child was playing with those paper dolls that you change their clothes. The doll was a Civil War era soldier with a Confederate Army uniform (I did know the family, and I'm sure this was a joke the father thought was hilarious). But the soldier came with a uniform that could put over the Confederate uniform, and the new uniform was a Union Army uniform, there were also various uniforms from various eras of the United States: WWII, Vietnam, and contemporary military uniform.

It dawned on me that I was looking at a perfect example of the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A mixed-race family, where the child was playing a toy and changing racist, hate-filled imagery into united, honorable imagery.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream. But his dream was not of his own making or own dreaming. His dream was nothing short of Gospel proclamation. His dream was nothing short of the Holy Spirit inspired visions that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Moses had. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Christian minister and his commitment to the Gospel was first and foremost in his life. He said in a sermon, "Before I was a civil rights leader, I was a preacher of the Gospel. This was my first calling and it still remains my greatest commitment. You know, actually all that I do in civil rights I do because I consider it a part of my ministry. I have no other ambitions in life but to achieve excellence in the Christian ministry. I don't plan to run for any political office. I don't plan to do anything but remain a preacher. And what I'm doing in this struggle, along with many others, grows out of my feeling that the preacher must be concerned about the whole man."

For Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. there was no disagreement between proclaim the gospel with your mouth and with your hands. For him, civil rights necessarily started with *saying* the Gospel. It wasn't enough, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, to simply act well. And it wasn't enough to simply speak well. For Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. our words and actions must match. We must speak and walk with congruence and consistency.

But we have far to go. There is no question: from the birther-movement during President Barack Obama's presidential campaign to the unnecessary deaths of innocent black boys at the hands of people in authority, we have still not achieved the dream. Racism and prejudice still dominate our society and the poor and venerable are still overwhelmingly minorities. Black men are incarcerated at rates two to three times others are. Poverty still unnecessarily affects black and latino communities.

Yesterday was Sanctity of Life Sunday. A celebration and reminder that God is pro-life. He is the Author and Giver of Life. But, as Christians, our words fall short of our action. We may support birthing centers and raise awareness of life at conception and of the physical and psychological effects of abortion. But if we are not pro-life and pro-flourishing after birth then our words fall short and our actions fall shorter. God is for everyone, we are told that God desires all to be saved and brought into relationship with him. Our words **MUST** be consistent with this. And we must not only point out injustice, and point out systemic racism and prejudice, but we must work and labor for the good of black communities that are under-resourced or our words are inconsistent with our actions, and inconsistent with God's Word and leading.

Let us be pro-life, pro-all-life in our words and actions.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. When was the last time you welcomed someone of another race into your home for a meal?
2. Check your heart: are you sympathetic toward those who hold racist views or hold prejudice against other races?
3. When is the last time you stood up for someone who was suffering? When was the last time you served someone who was suffering?
4. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that we should not be color-blind, but color-rich. Do you think our communities are better when they are diverse? If not, read Isaiah 2:2-4, 56:3-8, and 66:18-23. What do these passages tell us about God's plan for the Kingdom of God? If you do, what can you do to cultivate a diverse community at work, at home, and at church?