

Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, January 18, 2017

David Shirey

I am feeling thoroughly exhausted and gloriously uplifted after this past weekend's Martin Luther King, Jr. observations in Lexington.

On Saturday, my colleague, the Rev. Dr. Don Gillett, hosted a Community Forum at historic E. Second Street Christian Church. A panel consisting of Commander Mike Wright of the Police Department, the Rev. Carol Ruthven of the Episcopal Diocese, and State Senator Reginald Thomas discussed race relations in Lexington in a rich, thoughtful, hopeful dialogue moderated by the Rev. Kenneth Golphin of Quinn Chapel AME Church.

On Sunday evening, Central hosted the 27th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Worship Service. I know I'm biased, but our sanctuary exudes the beauty of holiness, a beauty that is polished to a glorious sheen when it is full from chancel to nave to balcony with the multi-hued breadth of Lexington's faith community. As our guest speaker, the Rev. Dr. Forrest E. Harris put it when he began his message, "Let's do this every week!" Looking from where I sat behind the lectern at the 65-voice choir, the lower sanctuary's full pews, and the balcony filled with youth from across Central Kentucky, I was button-popping proud to be a pastor of a congregation that is deeply respected by this community for its wide-armed, full-hearted hospitality.



photograph by John Lynner Peterson

On Monday morning, Jennie and I enjoyed the camaraderie of the thousands who welcomed the unseasonably warm weather to march through the downtown streets. We then attended the UK-sponsored MLK, Jr. program in Heritage Hall of the Convention Center at which the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III preached one of the most stirring sermons I have ever heard in my lifetime. Isaiah's words came to mind as I made my way out of the cavernous hall with a lilt in my step and a song in my heart:

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

My dear friend of 35 years, Dr. Robert Lee Hill, Minister Emeritus of Community Christian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, posted a piece about Dr. King on his Facebook page on Monday that I asked him for permission to reprint here. It's a chapter from a book manuscript titled "All the Help We Can Get: Great Souls, Great Prayers." After an introductory essay in which Bob offers a fine introduction to Dr. King, he offers a week of prayers focused on themes of his life and teachings. I am using them to guide my prayers this week and commend them to you for your spiritual nourishment.

Bob's prayer promptings invite action, reminding me of a quote of Dr. King's that was shared at Monday's program: "Prayer is a marvelous and necessary supplement of our feeble efforts, but it is a dangerous substitute."

PRAYING WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING:

Day 1 Pray today by giving thanks to God for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for his parents who gave him life, for the Church that nurtured his spirit and set him on his way as a champion of justice, equality, and goodness for all people, and for his perduring eloquence that resounds through the years.

Day 2 In 1953, as part of a series of radio broadcasts from his father's church, Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, before he was called to be the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he would be catapulted to the front lines of the civil rights struggle, King offered a prayer "that we may be children of light, the kind of people for whose coming and ministry the world is waiting." Pray today by pondering how you may be or become a child of the light, "for whose coming and ministry the world is waiting." Seek God's guidance as to where you might be of service to dispel darkness.

Day 3 Pray today by recalling one of Dr. King's first expressions of grand and public eloquence, at the age of 26, in an address to the Mass Meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association, at Holt Street Baptist Church, on December 5, 1955, in which he reminded his hearers and all of America of the momentous timing of their cause: "... you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.... there comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair.... There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July, and left standing amid the piercing chill of an alpine November...." Pray that you will be able to discern "the times" of your life and act out of your best self with decisive boldness and freedom.

Day 4 King's eloquence consisted not only in soaring rhetorical flourishes, but also in winsome resonances with people's daily lives. In the middle of a sermon he preached during his second year as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, King prayed, "Lord, help me to accept my tools. However dull they are, help me to accept them.... then help me to set out to do what I can do with my tools." Pray today for God's help to do what you can do with the tools with which you have been equipped.

Day 5 In the latter years of his life, King bore a special passion and burden for the betterment of America's cities, where so many people languished in poverty and despair. In Chicago, he prayed in front of City Hall: "... we pray for a greater vision of our task in this city; to build together a city of justice where none shall prey upon the weaknesses of others, a city of plenty where greed and poverty shall be eliminated, a city of brotherhood where success is founded upon service, and an honor given for nobleness alone." Pray this prayer today for the place where you live and for its leaders.

Day 6 King cherished the music of his Christian tradition and often used the words of his favorite hymns and gospel songs in his public prayers. Select one of your favorite hymns/songs and include words from that piece of music in your prayers today.

Day 7 Pray today by considering how you might define "the beloved community" which King envisioned and worked for throughout his entire ministerial career. Seek God's guidance for the places and the people with whom you might work in the creation of such a "beloved community" right where you are.

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