

Sermons at Christ Church

Lord, Make Me An Instrument Of Your Peace.

Epiphany II/Dr. King Sunday
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer
2023.01.15

He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus.

Take me to the place where the Messiah lives. Today we celebrate the life of a man-Dr. Martin Luther King. He epitomized the best of humanity, the best of Christianity, the best of America and the best of everything we know and can appreciate about love and non-violence. He was one man who opened our eyes to the best that is possible in each of us. He was a man who told us about the Messiah, and like Andrew, walked us to the place where the Messiah was staying. Wherever the Messiah stays is a place recognized as a place of human fulfillment, dignity, healing, mending, peace, brotherliness, compassion and love. It is a house where even the oppressor is welcomed with open arms.

Reading today’s text from the prophet Isaiah reminds me of what Harry Belafonte said about Dr. King in a documentary. This is what he said. *“He was one of those special ones who come once in a life time destined for particular purpose.”* Their purpose is the overthrow of the oppressor. Harry’s words sounds like the testimony that John gave about Jesus “And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

Dr. King was a young man who having been baptized with the Holy Spirit believed in the power of love that overcomes every darkness there is. This was a young man who believed in the power of redemption. This was a young man who believed ever so deeply that God in no way abandons God’s people. This was a young man who believed what the psalmist wrote “Weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning.” The joy which comes in the morning is the joy of redemption, freedom, liberty, affirmation, the joy of holding hands together-in the Messiah’s house. The joy of celebrating every human being, the joy of the human story. It is a joy that the oppressor cannot comprehend

This was the joy the Dr. King had, it was a joy that superseded all the trials and tribulations that he had to go through. That joy was captured in the dream of seeing his children, and children of all races, ethnicities and background play together, study together, dream together, build together, worship together and fellowship together.

Like the ancient Jews who were in exile and yearned for their freedom, African Americans were also in exile and yearned for a freedom which their oppressors wasn’t ready to offer.

Growing up in the streets of European Town, Sekondi, there was a Slave Fort, Fort Orange, built by the Dutch in 1642. This fort has now been turned into a light house-how ironic. The building which used be the center of the darkness of human experience, where human beings were bought and sold, imprisoned and forcibly shipped across the oceans to unknown destinations is now a light house.

Now tell me, who said transformation isn't possible? Who said we cannot turn lives around? Who said we cannot look at our society and make the changes that are necessary for each of us to thrive? Who said we cannot offer redemption and solace to those who hunger and thirst for freedom? Who said we cannot set free those who are in bondage? Even the oppressor and oppressive systems can be transformed but not through violence, but through the overwhelming power of love. That was the point of Dr. King.

As a kid, I saw the Slave Fort every single day of my young life. But like many people in my neighborhood, no one knew anything about the history of the fort, the atrocities, abuse, violence and the dehumanizing activities that took place in the for-we didn't know it was the symbol of the oppressor.

Allow me to tell another story, soccer is the most popular sport in my native Ghana, and as kids, all we wanted to do was to play soccer at every opportunity. The sad reality was that soccer balls were hard to come by. One of the kids in my neighborhood was Godwin. Godwin's mother lived in Nigeria and she occasionally sent Godwin soccer balls.

Whenever Godwin has a soccer ball, he played the role of a player, captain, coach and referee. He gets to select who plays with his soccer ball and who plays in his team. Godwin's words were final. If you dare challenge Godwin, all he had to do was to pick up his soccer ball and head home. We will literally beg Godwin not to take his soccer ball home. We will apologize for the mistakes of those who dared to challenge him over his decision. It didn't matter to Godwin whether he was right or wrong, what mattered to him was that he had the power-the power of an oppressor.

Godwin commanded such an enormous power and control over his playmates because of what he had -a soccer ball. I never thought of Godwin as an oppressor, but he certainly displayed the characteristics of an oppressor, he used what he had-a soccer ball which his friends did not have to subdue them into mere puppets. He used the power that he had to get his way with a simple soccer game. He didn't care if he was hurting the feelings of his playmates with his actions. He didn't care if his decisions were right or wrong, justified or not, all he cared about was winning because he had the power-the soccer ball.

For a start, any system that debases others is an oppressive system and those who contribute in perpetuating the life of that system are themselves oppressors because they, like my friend Godwin, are using the power that they have to oppress and subdue those who do not have the same power

The oppressor cares less about the feelings of the oppressed, doesn't care about whether their actions are moral, ethical or justified-the oppressor even uses scripture to justify their oppression. What matters is power; the brazen use of power to maintain the status quo and to convince themselves that there is something inherently superior about them and something inherently inferior about the oppressed. The oppressor assumes that he is the archetype of God's creation, and that everyone should look and think like him.

The oppressor does not believe in the differences that abound in God's creation, because to believe those differences would mean to accept the value of others. The oppressor rather confuses differences with defects, and concludes that there might be something wrong with those who are different.

The oppressor is so blinded by their desire for security and the belief in their superiority that they underestimated the silent weapon of love and of those who believe that all of God's creation is equally valued. Added to that reality is that one race cannot oppress another in perpetuity. Dr. King believed that all of God's creation is diverse, beautiful, dignified and equally valued. He understood the transformative power of the gospel. Remember, the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ rests on its ability to set free those who are in bondage. The gospel sets free both the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressed can yet love the oppressor and the oppressor finds value for their own lives through the love of the oppressed.

Dr. King was aware of the kind of love that moves people to invite and lead others to Christ. In today's gospel story, Andrew, heard John speak of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He follows Jesus to his house and then goes to his brother Peter with the message, "We have found the Messiah."

We have found the one who sets people free from their sins, we have found the one who makes us whole. We have found the one who takes all of our brokenness and mends them. We have found the one who teaches us the power of love. He then takes Peter to the Messiah's house. He leads his brother to the ultimate place of fulfillment.

Take me to where the Messiah is staying. Take me to that place of fulfillment, freedom, affirmation and wholeness.

See, where the Messiah lives, there is none in bondage, in the Messiah's house there is none who is superior to others, and there is none who is inferior to others, in the Messiah's house are a rainbow of free people with dignity.

If you don't know where the Messiah lives, you cannot take others with you to his house.

Dr. King knew where the Messiah lived and the fact that he was able to lead us to the Messiah's house diminished the effect of any kind of hatred or animosity that African Americans may have had towards their oppressors.

Listen to Dr. King, *"In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let's us NOT seek to satisfy our thirst for Freedom by drinking from the cup of Bitterness and Hatred."*

This is what the atmosphere in the Messiah's house looks like- a place devoid of hatred, anger and bitterness. A place which abounds in the fullness of love, the fullness of compassion, freedom and brotherliness. It is a place where even the oppressor can find some semblance of peace. Take me to the Messiah's house. Amen.

