

AUGUST 16, 2009 SPACE FOR GRACE READINGS AND MESSAGE

I. Scripture and MLK Readings

Isaiah 58:1-7

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the house of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
‘and have you not seen it?’

Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.

Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for a man to humble himself?

Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Luke 12: 49-51

" I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!
But I have a Baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do
you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."

**Excerpt from "Where Do We Go From Here," Martin Luther King's final
presidential speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, August
1967:**

**". . . the real reason that we must use our resources to outlaw poverty
goes beyond material concerns to the quality of our mind and spirit.
Deeply woven into the fiber of our religious tradition is the conviction
that [humans] are made in the image of God, and that they are souls
of infinite metaphysical value. If we accept this as a profound moral**

fact, we cannot be content to see [people] hungry, to see [people] victimized with ill-health, when we have the means to help them . . .
.”

II. The Message—“An Unsettling Force: Love and Justice”

- Introduction and Background:
 - Poverty Initiative—it’s mission {refer to www.povertyinitiative.org
 - The Poverty Initiative’s use of King’s work as a way of organizing people to address economic injustice.
 - How Scripture/Christian theology influenced King’s thinking and activism, leading him into the civil rights struggle and then broadening his view of civil rights to include human rights/economic justice; and then leading him to recognize that economic justice was not just a issue for blacks, but instead called for a broad-based, anti-poverty movement that would seek to unite people across color, ethic, class, geographic and other boundaries. REFERENCE THE NEW BOOK: A new and unsettling force.
 - The Poverty Scholar Leadership School—Reigniting the Poor People’s Campaign: The overarching theme of the Leadership School is re-igniting Martin Luther King’s Poor People’s Campaign. That theme includes at least three key concepts:
 - (1) We are called to “do justice” (including human rights/civil rights/**economic justice**)—to seek social harmony and equality grounded in love; and
 - (2) Justice requires transforming social structures to eliminate structural injustice-- social/racial /gender and economic barriers;
 - (3) Structural transformation requires a grassroots movement that transcends racial, ethnic, class and even faith boundaries.

- DETAILS ABOUT AND ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE LEADERSHIP SCHOOL:
 - 170 people
 - Intergenerational, interfaith, interracial, multi-cultural, global, crossed virtually all class boundaries
 - Some of the participants
 - 1) Church of Scotland
 - 2) South African Shack Dwellers
 - 3) PSU
 - 4) CADRE
 - 5) Jesus People Against Pollution
 - 6) ROC-NY
 - 7) DWU
 - 8) DAWG and Teen DAWG
 - Matewan
 - Larry's Mountain—Mountain Top Removal Mining

IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM I LEFT SOME MATERIALS THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO TAKE A LOOK AT : newspaper articles, books, etc

- The Scripture reading(s) and the excerpt from Martin Luther King's final presidential address to the SCLC were chosen as illustrations of how our scripture-based Christian faith calls us to love God by loving our neighbor as ourselves—an imperative to do justice; and not just individual justice, but to insist upon *social* justice—to insist upon social systems and structures that are designed to implement our deeply held sacred values that all of creation is sacred; that all people are created equal in God's image and are entitled to be treated with equal reverence, respect and human dignity. If we believe that, then as Christians who walk the walk and not just talk the talk, we need to accept personal and societal responsibility, AND RESPOND WITH LOVE, FOR the "least", "the last", the marginalized, impoverished, the sick, disabled, the imprisoned—ALL THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING CONDITIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WE OURSELVES WOULD NOT WANT TO ENDURE.

- I challenge all of us to reflect upon these readings and in doing so to consider the following:
 - Jesus, like Isaiah, was an unsettling force, a prophetic voice of God.
 - In challenging each of us to love our neighbor as ourselves, and challenging the political and economic status quo in Palestine under Roman rule, Jesus, like Isaiah, was telling us that fasting and worship do not please God at all if instead of practicing our faith, our lives are full of

“quarreling and strife”;

“striking each other with wicked fists”;

“exploiting your workers” and others.

- Instead, Jesus, like the prophet Isaiah, not only told us, but showed us in his own life, that each one of us, and our social order, must:

“loose the chains of injustice”;

“set the oppressed free”;

“share our food with the hungry”;

And insure that everyone has shelter and clothing.

- Like Jesus, KING was an unsettling force in challenging racial, social and economic boundaries;
- Most importantly, we too are called upon to be a "new and unsettling force" to respond to enormous economic and other societal inequities that are even more pronounced today than they were in 1967-68 when King was conceiving the Poor People's Campaign.

- Conclusion

- Martin Johnston, Church of Scotland, during the Panel on Role of Religion:

“We don’t have a problem with poverty. We have a problem with wealth. We have a problem with greed.”

- I hope and pray that tonight marks the beginning of a conversation among us, leading towards concerted and committed action in response to the Christian, social imperative to work toward economic justice and to overcome divisive social, racial and economic boundaries—to make sure that all others are treated just as we would like to be treated ourselves.