

Give Beyond Yourself to Create a Beloved Community
Seacoast MLK Coalition Breakfast (January 16, 2006)
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I hope that my message will raise awareness of the fact that there is much work to be done to accomplish Dr. King's DREAM; therefore, I want to challenge each of you today to: *Give beyond yourself to create a beloved community (where social, political, and economic justice are more the norm than the exception).*

Dr. King's message of the Beloved Community moved from his having a dream to having a shared plan of action. Today, we celebrate the life and contributions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., minister, civil rights leader, intellectual, social reformer, author, recipient of countless accolades and awards, winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, parent, and charismatic leader seeking social justice for the disenfranchised during the volatile social climate that was the backdrop for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Even though he had predicted his own premature demise on countless occasions, the country endured a mood of hopelessness and shock when he was suddenly taken from this earth at the hands of an assassin's bullet on April 4, 1968. It has only been in recent history when we, as a nation witnessing the drastic turning back of the clock regarding human rights and civil liberties, have truly understood that Dr. King's message of the Beloved Community which liberally utilized the dream metaphor, was meant to be a clarion call for action.

An Action Plan

We must also have an action plan that moves us and others outside of our Comfort Zones to the Land of the Unfamiliar-in order to arise with our brothers and sisters to the Promised Land of the Beloved Community or to the next rung on the ladder. The "Beloved Community" is not for the faint at heart, but it is reserved and specifically designated for those who are willing to fight for justice, equality, and inclusion for all people. It is also important that we know that the Beloved Community that Dr. King spoke of will not come into being without sacrifice...sacrifice and tenacity of spirit from us. I would dare suggest that it is sometimes easier to simply wait for someone else to take the risks for us. In all honesty, when it comes to the topic of CHANGE, people often urge us to wait for the right time. My grandfather would say that "weight (wait) broke the wagon". On behalf of justice and truth I urge you, let's not wait. Waiting can be destructive. Waiting for the right time to do the right thing permits injustices to continue and possibly to flourish. Due to the circumstance that we are currently facing as a nation, 2006 must be a time for **action** and **transformation**.

I stand on the shoulders of change agents; those who would not wait until the most convenient time to stand up for what was right. As an African American woman who attended four years of public segregated schools of the South, I can say with certainty that I stand here today, because of Dr. King's leadership and courageous actions. I stand here today also because of many of you in this room voiced the need for more initiatives for diversity and inclusion at UNH. I am happy to say that there were

ears that heard your pleas and took action when it was not popular to appoint a Vice Provost for Diversity. Your words have power, but your *actions* are *more powerful*. It is important to continue to use our words and actions as a means of giving beyond our individual priorities and beyond our selves!!

In 1989 Robert A. Sengstacke wrote the *Civil Rights Prayer* and it reads:

We are made in the image of God, African Americans, as well as all others. From blood has God created all the races and nations of the earth...

We are thankful for Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers, James Farmer, and Fannie Lou Hamer. Nothing could quench their thirst for freedom. It was their time and they would not be denied...

May God help us to exercise more seriously our right to vote and our pursuit of equality. God strengthen us in the ongoing struggle for freedom, civil rights, and justice.

The need for that prayer is ever so present in 2006. In our quest to keep the dream, vision, and struggles of the forbearers of the Civil Rights Movement alive and well, we must never forget what was, but most importantly, we must acknowledge the injustices of today and take the corrective action that is needed to transform our country. This country still needs freedom fighters, change agents, and agitators.

Dr. King's Work and Message are More Pertinent Today

Dr. King's work and message are more pertinent today than ever before. Dr. King's work and message impacted many aspects of our society and his messages are ever so powerful today. He challenged the power brokers and common person to see the world as it really was, then to work to bring about change. Dr. King's work and mass marches were about education, health care, voter's registration, economic stability, changing public policy, affordable housing, fair hiring practices, raising the minimum wages for the poor, denouncing the funding of the Vietnam War.

Yes, Dr. King moved from analyzing the ills of America to demanding action using a holistic approach and the principles of nonviolence. This solitary man, within a span of thirteen years, did something that changed the way America viewed and treated a portion of its citizens, who were historically faced with racist, sexist, restrictive laws as part of their daily living. The power of his message and the appeal of his movement brought thousands of people of goodwill, of all races, ethnic groups, religions and socioeconomic status, to his camp. Dr. King saw Gandhi's passive resistance movement and the ways it lifted India from under the British system of domination - and he related those views to his in America. Dr. King adhered to the use of civil disobedience, the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government or of an occupying power without resorting to physical violence.

Dr. King stated, *Life's most persistent and urgent Question is, What are You doing for Others?* and my question to you this morning is, Are you committed to give beyond yourself to advance the needs of others in order to create that Beloved Community?

We pay homage to Dr. King because of his commitment to being a change agent. Now, I want to reflect upon two of Dr. King's messages that mirror current issues faced by our nation and reinforces our need for action:

1967, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*(book)
1968, *I See The Promised Land* (sermon)

These two messages focus upon social, economic, and political power, the means/tools that individuals need in order to seek self-improvement (education and affordable housing).

Economic and Social Injustices

Economic injustice and racial deprivation are still with us. Like the Memphis Garbage workers who held a strike in the 1968 for economic security, Toussaint and the New York Transport Workers Union, also used civil disobedience in refusing to allow the dismantling of the union workers' retirement and health care plan and to negotiate for economic security. As noted by McWhorter (2006) in *USA Today*, Dr. King began contesting financial privileges and organized mass multiracial protest called the Poor People's Campaign and, amazingly enough, we are approaching 40-years since the Memphis Strike and economic injustice and racial suffering in America continues to exist.

War continues to be a drain on our country's resources. The Vietnam War much like the current war in Iraq required money. King denounced the Vietnam War and stated in 1967 that "... *money for guaranteed annual incomes to educate children was a better use of the funds targeted for the Vietnam War.*" He called for America to have a rebirth that would change its whole structure and the way it did business.

In his "*I See the Promised Land*" message, Dr. King focused on economic and social injustices and unfair hiring practices. I contend that if persons would engage in fair hiring practices, many of us would not be so afraid of what may happen with Affirmative Action with the next appointed Supreme Court Justice. If economic justice prevailed, then the Coal Miners could be more certain that the money needed for OSHA regulations to be followed would be supplied and they would be assured that the mines that they are entering are safe mines, but until the priorities are realigned, we will continue to lose people in the coal mines.

If You Do Not Give Beyond Yourself

Dr. King spoke about reversing the question. My example of this principle comes from the title of this message: If I give beyond myself to create a Beloved Community what will be the outcomes?

The reverse of that question is: If I Do Not give beyond myself to create a Beloved Community what will be the outcomes? I think that I have a few answers to that question. If You Do Not Give beyond yourself then:

- The doors to the educational enterprise may NOT be opened to the disenfranchised.
- The No Child Left Behind educational reform policy MAY leave children behind.
- Affirmative Action policies MAY NOT continue to exist to open doors for minorities and women to enter institutions of higher education and careers.
- Our elderly WILL NOT have food and proper heating in order to have medicine.
- The United States WILL forget the poor and improvised such as victims of Hurricane Katrina who still are suffering. Dr. King stated that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
- War and bloodshed WILL steal many more lives in the U.S. and abroad. Dr. King said, “*Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.*”

I will conclude as I began with the *Civil Rights Prayer* by Robert A. Sengstacke:

We are made in the image of God, African Americans, as well as all others. From blood has God created all the races and nations of the earth...

We are thankful for Rosa Parks, Medgar Evers, James Farmer, and Fannie Lou Hamer. (We are thankful for Martin Luther King Jr.) Nothing could quench their thirst for freedom. It was their time and they would not be denied...

May God help us to exercise more seriously our right to vote and our pursuit of equality. God strengthen us in the ongoing struggle for freedom, civil rights, and justice.

There is much work to be done; therefore, I want to challenge each of you today to be a Drum Major for Love, a Drum Major for Righteousness, and Drum Major for Justice. I encourage you to give beyond yourself to create a beloved community.

References

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- Washington, J.M. (1986). *A testament of hope: The essential writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* HarperCollins, San Francisco, (pp. 245-252, 279-286).