



Toward a Just and Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday

A Litany for Martin Luther King Sunday

All of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s work, from the very beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, was oriented toward the creation of a community characterized by love and justice, a society completely integrated among different races, a vision he called "the Beloved Community."* Legislated desegregation was just the beginning; although laws could correct injustices of housing, education and employment, such legislation could not effect the change of hearts and minds which would foster true community. A whole-hearted integration of society was King's hope and the hope of the movement he led.

Today, in the year which marks the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., society's work toward full integration continues; within communities of color the cry out for equity or a level playing field across the board still remains a constant challenge. The church's work toward the Beloved Community continues as well. The work for this whole-hearted integration in both society and church includes today not only people excluded by race, but also those excluded by gender, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

From my position, vocationally as Minister for Racial Justice and personally along the varied intersections and continuum of systemic and personal oppression, I pray for deliverance from the forces which foster the societal evils and spiritual deaths of segregation in all its contemporary guises. To that end, the following litany has been inspired by Psalm 86 and Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community.

Let us pray:

*Incline your ear, O God, and answer us,
for we are poor, hungry, naked, homeless and sick.
Preserve our lives, for we are devoted to you;
save your servants who trust in you.*

Dr. King's work reminds us:
church and state must work together for the common good;
laws must establish justice for all,
but hearts must change for the Beloved Community to flourish.

**We will do the work of justice for all;
we will open our hearts to an ever-expanding vision of community.
We will trust the Spirit of God to guide and move us
between the present and the anticipated Realm of Justice.**

*You are our God; be gracious to your children, for we cry out to you all day long.
Bring joy to the soul of your servants, for to you, O God, we lift up our soul.*

Dr. King's vision inspires us:

"We are tied together in a single garment of destiny
caught in an inescapable network of mutuality."

**We will work for a world where lives are enriched by difference;
where people of different genders, races and sexual orientations
work together in Shalom for the good of the whole.
We will work for a nation where persons will be judged solely
upon the content of their characters.**

*For you, O God, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.
Give ear, O God, to the prayers of the marginalized;
listen to our supplications.*

Dr. King's words challenge us:

"...injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

**We will listen to the cries of the poor;
we will stand in solidarity with those who suffer oppression;
we will take as our own the hopes of all who long for full human life;
we will create in our midst the Beloved Community
with room for all, justice for all, joy for all, Shalom for all.
We will listen to the voice of the Christ,
who stirs about liberating all minds, hearts and spirits.**

*In our days of trouble we call on you, for you will answer us.
There is none like you among the gods, O God,
nor are there any works like yours to the ends of the earth.
Teach us your way, O God, that we may walk in your truth.*

Dr. King's life inspires us:

"I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and
be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed
and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land...
I still believe that someday we shall overcome."

**We will overcome because of our faith and trust in God.
We will reach the goal laid before us without faltering.
We will never give up our hope for equality with one another.
We will live Dr. King's dream into our reality.**



Toward a Just and Beloved Community: Martin Luther King, Jr., Sunday was written by Rev. Dr. Bentley de Bardelaben, Minister for Racial Justice, Justice and Witness Ministries.

*The inspiration for this prayer is taken from *Vision of the Beloved Community*, in **Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.** by Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr. © 1998, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. All but the final quotation is taken from King's work within this chapter. The last quotation is taken from "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," in **A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.**, edited by James M. Washington, © 1986, Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

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