

# A Dream Still Lives- Martin Luther King, Jr Sunday



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His dream still lives. Dr King's dream still lives. A dream of equity, of justice, of respect, of possibility, of love. His dream is not realized has not been realized and these past 40+ years have brought us maddeningly close and agonizingly far from his wonderful visions.

Maya Angleou, that prophetic and deeply moving poet wrote, "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again". Her words are quoted in the great new UUA book of readings, Lifting Our Voices, and they spoke to me as I was thinking about this sermon topic and in general about Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the matter of a dream, and also of my dream of being an antiracist, multicultural, multi-ethnic society of love and justice for all.

This Saturday was the anniversary of the 40 acres and a mule movement. In 1865, 400,000 acres of land in the south were set aside with the intention of giving every former slave 40 acres of land to start their life over, giving what was presumed to be an equitable settlement allowing the former slave the ability to move to a place of equal status with their former white slave holder. We know that not all former slaves received their promised land as President Andrew Johnson revoked the decree a year after that 1865 date and we know that there is still not equal status given to the sons and daughters of slaves, not equal status given to black men and women and children.

“History cannot be unlived but if faced with courage need not be lived again.” Oh Ms. Maya I do wish those words were the reality. Note again this piece of history from Saturday January 16, 1989. Three days of rioting began in Miami Fla when a police officer fatally shot a black motorist, Clement Lloyd, causing a crash that also claimed the life of his passenger, Allan Blanchard. The officer was

convicted of manslaughter but was acquitted in a retrial. History is repeating itself because we have not faced with courage the issues that keep surfacing.

Let me take a few moments and be lovingly prophetic - You might not believe me about the lack of equal status and the issues that we have not addressed with courage that keep resurfacing. However, look at the number of black men committed to prison versus the same statistics for white men who are accused of the same crimes. Michelle Alexandar wrote a book and calls this the New Jim Crow. Look at the recent spate of issues surrounding the death of black men and youth by police. Look at how a person of color who attains a professional position is often thought of being in that position because of affirmative action not because they are equal in intelligence, capability, education; look at the driving while being black statistics. These are so appalling and frequent that comedians make bad jokes about them. Look at those politicians running for office, who can get away with hate filled statements, putting down the other and setting up a tribalism mentality, setting up a sense of scarcity and fear against anyone who doesn't have a face like theirs, frankly who doesn't have a face like mine-

white and- Euro. Look at the way some applaud those who put down the concept of “political correctness” saying it has gone too far. In my opinion we can never go too far to be polite, to speak kindly of others, to be sensitive, to be appreciative of and to get to understand another’s sense of the world and what they experience. Political correctness doesn’t mean that we need to agree with others from other races and cultures. No matter what race or culture we can confront and challenge those who push a specific agenda that is not for the social good. We do not need to excuse socially or personally inappropriate behavior, yet we live in a richly diverse world a community of beings with differing values, opinions and perspectives, learning how to navigate these waters can be challenging. But political correctness is no excuse for rudeness, insensitivity, prejudice and for saying whatever hateful thing you want to say because you don’t want to be censored. One thing I have learned about acknowledging that I am a racist is that I do need to sensor and filter my thinking through a lens I am not used to wearing. Oh and just in case you didn’t hear me – I am a racist. I try not to be prejudice or discriminatory but by virtue of being of Euro descent and being white I benefit from a power and privilege that persons of color don’t

have. Racism is a system, it is the system's use of power and privilege that makes me racist. It is not a way that I want to be but I am part of a system that was built by those who look like me, who share my culture, who put things in place and want to maintain the status quo that furthers my culture, I have privilege to do things that women of color can't. For example: the new director of ministry studies at Andover Newton is a black woman, she moved up to Mass from New York/ New Jersey area. We were talking the other day about exercise, she used to run in the neighborhood she lived in. She doesn't run now because as she says, "she is the only one of them around". Them being a black woman and to run puts her at a disadvantage of being judged in all sorts of ways that the other neighbors all white are not judged on.

Perhaps you agree with me, yet it is hard work wrapping our heads around the power and privilege we do have. Especially as women, but use your experience to reflect on how some of the very best males you knew who didn't really intentionally oppress you, did so just by virtue of the cultural, social, even systematic ways of viewing females because of the system they were raised in, a system

that didn't and sometimes even now doesn't change. It is tough work to do the personally challenging and personal inventory that is needed if we want the world to be a better, more just, more equitable, more loving place. I know some of you have children and grandchildren, relatives who are multiracial, multi- ethnic, you have persons who you want to develop deeper relationships with too, you have co-workers also and you want to be friends with those of all races and ethnic groups. We are living in rich times and the need to become aware and in tune to the world around is right here in front of us is looming large. Dr. King has given us some tools to do a lot of this self-reflection and building of bridges which I will present after I talk a bit more about this issue of complexity.

I know many of these situations are extremely complex and have layers and layers to them. However, I do believe we Unitarian Universalist can handle the complexity of life and justice. After all we handle the complexity of being Unitarian Universalist who are *not* required to subscribe to a particular creed but instead who take from our life experiences, who take from our spiritual and religious experience and craft a Unitarian Universalist belief system

that works for us and for our world. We can handle the complexity of being a congregation made up of all those whose spectrums of belief are wide ranging and incredibly diverse, we can handle the complexity of our youth and perhaps even of ourselves who are trying to navigate the world of gender and sexual orientation, together we can even come to navigate the concept of belongingness, of wholeness. And, we can handle the complexity of Martin Luther King Jr's dream too.

He wasn't just going to settle for "why can't we all just get along" he wasn't going to settle for all gathering together to march and sing freedom songs, he wasn't going to settle for the poorest of the poor, no matter what racial makeup being sent to war, or not being paid equitable wages, he wasn't going to settle for churches being the most segregated hour of the week, he wasn't going to settle for his children being treated like they were good little boys and girls but who were not allowed to interact with whomever they wanted to call friend. He was in favor of non-violence but that didn't mean he wanted to settle for an unjust society.

Non-violence or anti violence is the same as being anti-racist it means standing against something. From his book, my favorite of all his books, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, we are offered many solutions in a meaningful and approachable way.

He says, “We must stand up amidst a system that still oppresses and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values...”<sup>1</sup>

What values, ideals, principles are majestic? Good question? A dream such as MLK’s should have magnificent, grandiose, splendid values. Reading King over and over again, the most significant most splendid value he writes about is love. Not sentimental, romanticized, idealized love, but the deepest love possible a love that knows no boundaries, a love that is transcendent, a divine love that for him meant being in right relationship with God and with others. He writes about the power of love, and about love as an action, it is an unassailable good. It can not be taken away, it is at the root of justice, mercy, compassion. It is power, he writes, “Love without power is sentimental and anemic.” That means that it is unexamined love, it is simple

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<sup>1</sup> P. 50 *Lifting Our Voices, Readings in the Living Tradition*. UUA. Boston 2015

and it is weak. Love and power mixed together is not weak, it is courageously looking at our history, both collectively and personally and righting wrongs, standing up against systems that oppress, systems that maintain a status quo, systems that are in a rut and not implementing all that is possible. He says, “Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.” MLK

He had a dream and that dream has been caught by many. But his dream is not a reality yet, history has been painfully repeating itself. Yet, we need not continue to stand in the stream that allows the systemic oppression to continue. When fishing in the current, sometimes you need to step out of that current to get another view- to see with another lens. This is what celebrating MLK’s birthday allows us to do, it allows us to get out of the current and see with a different lens.

I hope you will join us downstairs for the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. Good food, good lecture and the possibility to explore some areas of complexity with others awaits.

So be it. May it be so