

The Fourth Sunday after The Epiphany  
January 15, 2017  
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## What Are You Looking For?

Last week I learned two details about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's early years that really surprised me. First, when King was born, he was given his father's name – Michael. But a few years later, Dr. King's father, who was a Baptist minister, traveled to Germany for the first time and was so impressed with the story of Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, that King changed his name and his son's name from Michael King to Martin Luther King.

I also learned that Dr. King decided to attend seminary and become a Baptist preacher like his dad when he was just 18 years old! This was during the summer before his last year at Morehouse College since he started college very early. As an 18-year-old, King came to believe that the Church offered the most assuring way to answer his "inner urge to serve humanity..."

I can't remember knowing anything about Dr. King until near the end of my sixth-grade year when I was 11. In 1963 my family moved from the suburbs of New Jersey to South Georgia and I finished sixth grade in a completely segregated school. In fact, the entire society, culture of South Georgia was radically different from my experience growing up in New Jersey. I had moved from a completely integrated, diverse society to one harshly divided along racial lines. Schools, theaters, sports teams, churches, even beaches along the ocean were segregated for "whites only" or "coloreds. It was very strange and shocking.

In April 1963, prior to the August march in Washington for jobs and freedom, when Dr. King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech, he was arrested for leading a march in Birmingham, Alabama. While in jail, King wrote a letter to the media and the clergy criticizing them for their lack of support for the Civil Rights movement. Included are two famous King quotations:

"...injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." And in response to moderate white clergy calling for unity and patience, Dr. King said they were "a great stumbling block" who are "more devoted to order than to justice and prefer a negative peace which is the absence of tensions to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

Ten years later, in 1973, I read this letter for the first time while taking an undergraduate course in American Religious History. Living through the Civil Rights era, living in South Georgia those years, knowing the witness of Dr. King and others helped me to decide to attend seminary and devote my work to the mission of the Church.

Every year, when we come to the Sunday before Martin Luther King Day, we hear the Gospel story of Jesus at the start of his ministry. This includes the call to the first disciples. St. John tells us the first called were with John the Baptist. They turn from following the Baptist and they follow Jesus.

As the disciples follow, Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” “What do you seek?” Andrew and possibly John ask where Jesus is staying. Jesus invites them to “come and see.” It is late in the day, four in the afternoon. John writes, “they remained with him.” Through dinner? After? Did they talk late into the evening? The next morning? Andrew was so moved by his time with Jesus that he goes to find his brother, Peter. Andrew tells Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” And he brings Peter to Jesus.

Archbishop William Temple, in his commentary on John’s Gospel, writes that this is “the greatest service that one can do another...” to bring someone to Jesus!

Jesus asks us the same question and offers us the same invitation. What are you looking for? What is important in your life? What do you want to do with your life? Dr. King had an “inner urge to serve humanity.” What is our inner urge? And how does this change from the time we’re 18 to 30, to 50, to 70 and beyond?

Jesus always invites us to “come and see,” come and see how love transforms lives. Come and see how faith can change the world. Come and see how you can work for justice and peace. Come and see how you can serve Christ’s Body in this world, the Church.

The start to the Epiphany season is a time to consider “what we are looking for.” And we are presented many opportunities to “come and see.” Usually we make plans and review the life of our parish in mid to late January. Today, the Treasurer presents the budget and we consider those nominated to serve on the Vestry. Next week we hold our Annual Meeting. Together we reflect upon our life and work at Grace Church and we invite others to join us, to “come and see.”

Every four years, this is a week to celebrate the transition of power as a Presidential term begins. This year, a new President and a new political party come to the White House. We are blessed with our democratic federal system. Dr. King knew this system could help or hinder justice and peace. So we hope and pray the days ahead give us all a chance to celebrate as citizens of this nation and members of the Body of Christ, as we continue to hear Jesus ask all of us, “What are you looking for?”

Micah 6:1-8  
1 Corinthians 1:18-31  
Matthew 5:1-12