



Today, not only do so many throughout our country celebrate the birth of a man who made a desperately needed impact, but the church joins in as well. Because he was not just some random public speaker. He was an absolutely essential leader in God's church, our church. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., may just have been the closest we've had in the recent memory of our nation to a Jeremiah or an Amos or an Isaiah, who we heard from today: someone who helped us see God's yearning for all of us to, quite simply, love God and love our neighbors as our very selves. So, it seems only fitting that he receives his due honor this morning from us as well as his living siblings in Christ. With that in mind, I offer you a portion of a sermon of his, one he spoke the night before his life was tragically taken away from his family, from the church, from America. The pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr., said this:

*If I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of a panoramic view of the whole human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?" I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land.*

*And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there. I would move on by Greece, and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality.*

*But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all they did for the cultural and esthetic life of [humanity]. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even go by the way that the man for whom I'm named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther tack his ninety-five theses on the Wittenberg church door. But I wouldn't stop there. I would come up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating president by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry we have nothing to fear but fear itself.*

*But I wouldn't stop there. Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy." Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that [humanity], in some strange way, [is] responding-something is happening in our world...*

*You know, several years ago, I was in New York City autographing the first book I had written. And while sitting there a woman came up, "Are you Martin Luther King," and I said yes. The next minute I felt something beating on my chest. Before I knew it, I had been stabbed. That blade had gone through, and the X-rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery. Once that's punctured that's the end of you. It came out in the New York Times the next morning, that if I had sneezed, I would have died. They allowed me to read some of the mail that came from all over the states and the world.*

*I read a few, but one of them I will never forget. I had received one from the President and the Vice-President. I've forgotten what those telegrams said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl. And I looked at that letter, and I'll never forget it. It said simply, "Dear Dr. King: I am a ninth-grade student at the Whites Plains High School." She said, "While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I am a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze."*

*And I want to say tonight I am happy that I didn't sneeze. Because if I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1960, when students all over the South started sitting-in at lunch counters. And I knew that as they were sitting in, they were really standing up for the best in the American dream...If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been down in Selma, Alabama, to see the great movement there. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been in Memphis to see a community rally around those brothers and sisters who are suffering. I'm so happy that I didn't sneeze.*

*But I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And [God has] allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.*

Unfortunately, this most precious child of God in Martin Luther King, Jr., did not get to see much of any longevity beyond that night. All because God, as described in the Psalm we heard this morning: God put too much of a boundless love song into Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mouth. Because the pastor couldn't dare rest as far too many people suffered while others refused to act, the modern prophet of Martin Luther King, Jr., did not live much past the very words of hope he brought to an entire nation that desperately needed it.

Evidently, our precious sibling in Christ had too much love flowing through him, too much compassion in the depths of his soul, too much Resurrection power captivating his entire being; too much Gospel that others simply could not stand it anymore.

Except, it just so happens that God intends to wire us all exactly that way: overflowing in love, compassion, and relentless Resurrection power to ensure that we care for all children of God regardless of race, education, living conditions, wealth and anything else that we dare think should separate us in this life. God has other holy ideas, as if absolutely nothing can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. Yes, today, and always, we give thanks that our Lord refused to keep silence himself in his death-defying love for all of God's children. But also, today, and always, we give thanks for the prophets, including Martin Luther King, Jr., himself, who will never let us forget that Greatest News of all. Thanks be to God, indeed! Amen!

*Image: from Dan Budnik (Contact Press Images)*