

## We Shall Overcome

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Isaiah 62:1-5 (From biblegateway.com)

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- <sup>1</sup> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.
- <sup>2</sup> The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.
- <sup>3</sup> You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
- <sup>4</sup> You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,  
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,  
and your land Married;  
for the LORD delights in you,  
and your land shall be married.
- <sup>5</sup> For as a young man marries a young woman,  
so shall your sons marry you,  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.
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Well, it's been a rough week in the world. Images of Haiti haunt us. We all now know that it was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere before the earthquake. And we learned slowly over these days that there is an estimated (at last announcement) 140,000 - 200,000 deaths, according to which source is used, as a result of that earthquake. We see pictures of bodies being dumped in mass graves mixed along with rubble from the fallen buildings. It is a true catastrophe and the situation seems unbelievably beyond anyone's control.

Today we have amazing pictures from crews on the ground and from satellites in the sky. We have interviews with people who are in the midst of their pain and agony, those worrying about loved ones they haven't heard from and from survivors. The situation can seem very close to us, and the world is united in the pain of empathy. We do what we can to deal with the pain - and we hope and we pray - even if we aren't exactly sure what to pray for.

So this sermon has been over a week in the making. I've been contemplating it actually for some time. I went from "How am I going to preach on Martin Luther King Jr. day?" to how am I going to deal with Haiti, the scriptures and MLK day?

I went through 3 sermon title offerings for this Bulletin. First I chose, "You Shall be Called My Delight" from the Old Testament text, then I chose, "I. WILL. NOT. KEEP. SILENT." from earlier in that text, and finally I chose, "We Shall Overcome". I've never had such a difficult time choosing a title before.

Images of the Civil rights era and Haiti have been mixing around in my brain and I found I couldn't get the song, "Strange Fruit" out of my head. For those who don't know it, it was a poem written in 1936 which was made into a song made famous by the Blues/Jazz singer, Billie Holiday in 1939, and called the most influential song of the century in 1999. According to Wikipedia, the poem was written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish high-school teacher from the Bronx. He wrote "Strange Fruit" to express his horror after seeing Lawrence Beitler's photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana. I will share the poem with you, but recommend you go online and listen to Billie Holiday singing it.

### Strange Fruit

Southern trees bear strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.  
Pastoral scene of the gallant south,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,  
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.  
Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

I felt just last week that we had gotten so far away from these images. What the situation was like when Martin Luther King, Jr. was called to leadership is easily forgotten in these days when the leader of our country and the leader of the Republican Party are both African Americans. But the images of Haiti bring the injustices of that era back all too easily for me.

Another awakening alarm for me is a recent Supreme Court case. Two African American men, Terry Harrington and Curtis McGhee were framed by police and prosecutors when they were 17 years old for a murder of a policeman, which most likely was committed by a well positioned white young man. They spent 26 years in jail before being released in 2005. They tried to sue the prosecutors and it

was right before the Supreme Court when they settled out of court for 12 million dollars. The prosecutor's argument in their defense was that there is "no freestanding constitutional right not to be framed."

Justice. It seems so clear to some, and not at all to others. 200,000 years of humanity and we still haven't figured out what is truth what is fair what is just for humanity. Boy are we dumb.

Sometimes, yes albeit rarely, but sometimes in our history we have shining examples of people who saw the truth in spite of all the power and force behind the lie, and accomplished miracles. That is why Martin Luther King Jr. is such a legend today, because he spoke the truth – he took the chance to share it with others and it resonated enough to change the winds of justice.

He was an amazing man, and we know he wasn't alone. He had people around him who supported and protected him, who inspired him and shared the path together. He became the charismatic centerpiece for a movement that was empowered by many people. Many people, empowered by the Holy Spirit to use their gifts, helped to bring about the movement that Martin Luther King came to represent. Each was being the best they could be in what they had.

The movement, guided by him was empowered by our God, a God of justice and truth. And as we heard in Isaiah, "[He] would not keep silent, and for [justice's] sake [he] would not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch." Kind of a touchy reference when one takes into consideration the torches that he and others have been, and in some cases still are, threatened with. But let us see the torch on the statue of liberty as the burning torch that Isaiah was referring to.

The light of liberty - the light of justice - is the truth that has inspired people forever and will keep burning in our hearts. When we witness the response to this disaster in Haiti we witness the generosity that Jesus shared with the guest at the wedding feast when he supplied them with the best wine. We witness the unity of the nations coming together to help these poor and suffering people. Cuba is allowing planes to fly over their air space so as to help supplies get to Haiti faster; news teams are helping out instead of being 'just observers'; according to the United Nations, about \$268.5 million has been pledged by 20 countries, organizations and private companies, and this is just the beginning of the fund raising. And it still may not be enough to insure that injustices will not occur.

But we cannot give up hope. All the various gifts and various peoples, activated by the same spirit of generosity and love, so that this land shall one day no

longer be called desolate; but the world is hoping today that it will be called "God's Delight" as soon as possible.

Every one of us has had moments in our lives when it felt like our souls were desolate. That is why we can resonant so quickly and clearly with the injustice of the strange fruit and the chaos of Haiti. We know that there is injustice in this world; we have experienced it up close and personal. And sometimes the fear of being forever lost in that pain can be overwhelming.

That is why people like Martin Luther King Jr. are so important to not forget. Because he lived in the injustice and he showed us a source of abundance and delights, in spite of it all. In our faith we can have access to a place in God's heart where there is a generous portion of hope. With each other sharing our gifts, we have access to a support system based on wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, and speech. God asks us each to be the best that we can be and focus our attention on helping each other or on gratitude for those who help us. When we focus on what can be done in times of desolation, and when we focus on each other in trust, we will one day realize that our identity has become "God's Delight." AMEN