

All Ages Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday
I Have a Dream
Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver
January 19, 2025

Reflection on the Theme by Deborah Willoughby

I used to live in Montgomery, Alabama, a city known for American heroes like Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many others.

My family was there on the 50th anniversary of Rosa Parks' arrest and the bus boycott that followed. A lot of the older Black people I met were part of the boycott that changed history. I understood that a lot of the older white people I met had been on the wrong side of history. I think about this a lot, because I wonder what I'm doing right now to be on the side of justice. How can I make a difference?

Mrs. Parks and lots of other Black people wanted to organize for justice. They focused on discrimination on city buses. The laws were unfair. Black people were required to give up their seats so white people could sit down. And another thing: people would get on the bus through the front door and pay for their ride. Then some drivers would tell Black passengers after they paid to get off the bus and go around to the back door. That was mean. Some drivers, including the white man who had Rosa Parks arrested in 1955, would sometimes drive off before the Black passengers could get back on the bus. I can't imagine doing that.

I recently read about another bit of Alabama history. This was in 1947, and it involved members of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. A man named Jack Daughtry watched his daughters and other Native children standing on the side of the road waiting for the school bus. But the school bus, which was half full of white children, would just drive past them.

Jack Daughtry had gone to talk to public officials about this, but nothing changed. So one day he took a stand. He stood in the middle of the road, daring the bus driver to either run him down or stop. It stopped. His daughters and the other Creek children got on the bus and went to school. And Mr. Daughtry went to court, fighting to give the Creek children the right to a public education.

I have learned from a lot of brave people, including many who are here in church today or on zoom. And I try to be brave, although I don't always live up to my values. Sometimes I'm afraid of causing a fuss, or making someone mad at me, or maybe hurting someone's feelings when they do or say something that's harmful to others. I tell myself I'll do better next time.

If you think about it, you probably do brave things, and you probably know other courageous people, too. We can all be inspired by the heroes around us.

Revolutionary Spirit© by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

Dr. King's daughter, Bernice A. King, tweeted a response to the Gaza ceasefire, writing:

"I am grateful for the Gaza ceasefire and hostage release agreement and prayerful that it is sustained.

“I mourn the dead and mourn with devastated families. There are so many beloved children, parents, grandparents, homes, critical edifices, and pillars of community gone.

“And, on his 96th birthday, I can’t help but remember Daddy’s words:

‘These are revolutionary times...our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal opposition to poverty, racism, and militarism.’”

When I was younger, I wondered what it would have been like to live in the revolutionary times of the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s during the Civil Right’s Movement we remember this morning and celebrate with a holiday tomorrow. I no longer feel like I have to wonder. The revolutionary times are here. That is, we live in a time of dramatic change and political upheaval. And the need to recapture that revolutionary spirit, the spirit of turning things around, is great, certainly the greatest it’s been in my lifetime...

Many of us are more than upset by the recent presidential election that will put a man back in the highest office of the land who is not worthy of the role, and worse. His inauguration is tomorrow, and many of us don’t know what do to. Like Deborah, we wonder what are we doing right now to be on the right side of justice?

For those of us who are white in the context of a rise of white supremacy culture, we have additional responsibilities in my opinion – not to save the world for others – but to not go back to sleep and ignore the chaos around us. Many of us have the privilege -that is sufficient money and means and health to protect ourselves somewhat from the chaos of the world – though of course, such privilege is likely temporary and as the LA wildfires proved, can disappear in moments. But while we have a moment of sufficiency, it is important that we use our capacities to oppose poverty, racism, and militarism, and the environmental degradation that threatens us all.

We’re about to share with you all the *I Have a Dream* speech that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave 62 years ago at the March on Washington. It may feel out of place for me, a white woman, to be sharing these words, and with a largely white congregation, backed up by a mostly white choir. However, these words are important; important enough to share despite the different contexts. And though they were given by a black man to a predominantly black audience, their significance went well beyond that people, that time and that place. It had a global impact. It changed the course of history. And so it is important we hear his words, and hear them anew.

The strangest word in the text may be Negro, which was the preferred term in 1963 for people whom we now identify as African American or Black. Negro in Spanish means black, and the term does come to English as Negro from Latin through the Spanish and Portuguese. It’s not a word I’ve ever used in conversation, except in relation to this speech or other writings of the era. I especially wanted to make sure the children understand the term. And to remind you all that the term “man” and “mankind” was used back then to refer to all of humanity. It did not just mean people who identify as male.

So, on this day before an Inauguration none of us wanted to see, on the same day as a Federal Holiday recognizing the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. as the chief spokesperson for the Civil Rights Movement, we acknowledge that these, too, are Revolutionary Times and present to you *I Have a Dream*, with text by Martin Luther King Jr., and music by John Maas.