

Proper 15 Year C

“And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath Day?”

This coming Wednesday, the 28th of August, marks to the day the fiftieth anniversary of the march on Washington led by The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was at this massive gathering that Dr. King delivered his famous, “I have a dream” speech. If you’ve not read it in a while I encourage you to do so. It’s hard to read and feel the passion and hold back tears. In honor of the day we at All Saints, at 2:00 p.m. (Wednesday), will join many churches across the country and toll our Church Bell. I was eight years old when he delivered this speech....and really all I remember was the imposing image of the Lincoln memorial in whose shadow the speech was made; the vast hundreds of thousands of people....and my parents, mostly my father making hateful remarks about this black troublemaker. But truly this day changed our world, set into motion a new day for America and beyond. In the speech Dr. King describes the movement he represents as one with “the fierce urgency of now”....a fierce non-violent urgency now he says....It is in this speech that Dr. King says the immortal words....that he dreams of a day where one is not judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of one’s character. And perhaps most striking to me is Dr. King’s recognition that the destinies of Black people and the destinies of white people are intimately tied together. The destinies of the powerful are tied to the destinies of the marginalized. There cannot be two Americas he says, but one America in which the dream of justice and freedom and equality is shared by all. I believe that’s true of the entire human community, that we are all one body, symbiotic, that until all people are made whole, then none of us are whole.

I’ve been watching the horrible news breaking out of Syria lately....as of Friday morning the report said that of the millions of refugees fleeing Syria, one million are children. Bob Sheiffer commented that it is as bad as the Nazi interment camps in World War II. Brothers and sisters, those are our children too. The dream is for the world as well. And still at home, the uneducated or under educated child of impoverished rural Alabama is our child; the uneducated or undereducated child living in the projects of our cities is our child. We are all connected and we are all created to be advocates for each other....so we need to continue to talk about an adequate tax base, access to affordable health care...We need to muster our moral voice as Christians with the same fierce urgency voiced by Dr. King. It seems right now that the dream of which Dr. King spoke, to which he gave

his life, has met renewed opposition with the recent Voting Rights Act decision; the proliferation of voter suppression laws, stop and frisk laws; the cutting of food stamps funding and welfare and Medicaid, and the plague of violence....Oh, for Dr. King's moral voice in our own day.

I saw Friday morning a clip from the speech fifty years ago, and I marveled at the charismatic authority with which Dr. King spoke....and reading the gospel this week I realized that with all conviction from the depths of his soul and the depths of the soul of the movement he represented, he was speaking with the authority of the very gospels themselves....the gospels that are rhetorical pieces of literature written with a fierce urgency as well. Written to advocate a new and egalitarian and non-violent way of life; a literal reordering of society; written to give hope to the poor and the marginalized, to encourage those who suffer for conscience sake that their suffering will not be in vain....all of these virtues are contained in this one speech fifty years ago spoken over the Washington Mall towards the purblind seats of power in our world. Read it! In our brief passage in Luke today, Luke has Jesus heal a bent over woman on the Sabbath, which arguably was against Jewish convention. One doesn't heal on the Sabbath unless it was a dire emergency...that was the code....here is Jesus the troublemaker, again breaking boundaries, challenging convention.... like Martin....Women, as you know, in the ancient Near East were at best second class citizens, and to be diseased as well is to make matters much worse; one would be shunned from the community, pushed to the margins of existence. In Jesus' healing her, she is not only made well, but she is restored to wholeness and dignity, a lost one found and brought home, a bound one made free...and indeed he calls her a daughter of Abraham, which in Christian parlance would be the same as being called a saint. She is set free from her bonds....and true freedom, freedom... being unbound from that which binds ultimately is what the Gospels are all about. And Luke, as we have discovered in our reading Luke this year, calls for this freedom urgently.

Some scholars argue that the woman is a symbol of Israel bent double under the oppression of the empire....the figure of Satan tips us off, because Satan is generally used in the New Testament as a not so veiled allusion to the corrupt power and violence of the empire. But the bottom line is: until all in our communities, our state, our world, are raised to well being and dignity.... That is to say...set free... then all of us are bent double with the burden that the marginalized of our world carry. And our God who passionately loves us will not have it that way. We must, dear children of God, with the fierce urgency of now, with fierce creativity, with fierce

imaginations, and with fierce courage, become advocates for the beat-down of our world. It was Martin's dream...It was the dream of the gospel writers, the followers of Jesus who gave his life proclaiming God's dream for the world... Let us reinvigorate the dream, God's dream for a world made new....for the sake of the broken of our world and therefore for our sake as well...because we, all of us humans, are blood kin; we come from the same DNA....we are our brother's and sister's keeper.....and perhaps in the very near future, the future becoming now, we will hear a grand chorus loud and clear and fierce with joy that we are free, free at last.