

Reality Check WEEK TWO January 16, 2022

SCREEN: Martin Luther King Day image

On Monday, our nation honors the legacy of Rev. Martin Luther King.

To help celebrate his birthday, I encourage you to experience a virtual prayer service in this week's bulletin which was prepared last year by our racial justice committee.

The prayer service refers to a key moment in the struggle for civil rights.

Birmingham Alabama in 1963 was considered to be the most segregated city in America.

Restaurants, stores, even public restrooms had separate sections and entrances for Blacks and Whites.

There was widespread discrimination in employment and disparity in education.

So the leaders of the civil rights movement met with members of the business community to negotiate an end to segregation and inequality.

But business leaders said no.

As a result, Reverend King and others organized sit ins and marches - all non violent on their part - to draw attention to the injustices.

Their peaceful protests were met with violence and arrests.

But they ultimately prevailed - not just in Birmingham but throughout the South.

As I viewed the prayer service, I was humbled by those who were willing to sacrifice so much to overcome injustice.

Where did they find their courage and strength?

For those like Martin Luther King, the answer is obvious.

It came from their faith in Christ.

Jesus's ministry was reaching out to the poor, the hurting, and those on the margins of society, and embracing them as children of God.

Reverend King often spoke about his motivation.

God placed on his heart an intolerance for racism and injustice.

He saw the truth of what was going on and knew it needed to be corrected.

He had to speak out, he had to act.

SCREEN: Reality Check main screen

This is week two of our message series titled, Reality Check.

A reality check is when you recognize the truth about a situation.

A misconception that you had gets corrected.

At the start of this new year, we all need a reality check about ourselves, others and our world.

Last week we renewed our baptismal promises and heard the message that we need to see ourselves as God sees us -

as His loving children, saved through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Today's reality check directs our attention to how we see others.

And the focus is on these words that Mary spoke at the wedding feast of Cana:

SCREEN: Do whatever he tells you

Do whatever he tells you.

Let's take a closer look at the Gospel reading.

So we heard that Jesus, Mary and his disciples were invited to a wedding feast.

And at a certain point in the celebration the wine began to run out.

Mary asked her son Jesus to solve the problem.

At first, he seemed reluctant.

He said to her, "*my hour has not yet come.*"

But then he stepped in to help after Mary instructed the waiters to do whatever her son told them to do.

And Jesus performed his first miracle - he changed water into wine.

Now, there are so many things in this story I could delve into,

like why Jesus was initially reluctant to help, or why the wine ran out,

but this line spoken by Mary is the one I want to focus on for our reality check:

Do whatever he tells you.

Because for me, this isn't just the command to waiters at the wedding at Cana, it's Mary telling us what our relationship with her Son should be.

'Do whatever he tells you' means acknowledging,

I am not the boss in life, Christ is.

And when it comes to faith and how we live our lives,

this requires humility and obedience on our part.

It means surrendering control over those things in life we have no control over.

It means listening to God and following his commands even when it requires sacrifice or suffering on our part.

This is something we can all struggle with.

But it is essential for us to see others clearly.

So what is the reality check here for you?

Start by answering this question:

SCREEN: How do I see others?

When you look at others, especially those who are different from you, do you see your brothers and sisters, children of the one God, or do you see only adversaries or strangers?

As divided as our nation was in 1963, it seems even more divided now.

We are divided racially, politically, ethnically and economically.

And these divisions affect how you and I see others - including family members or friends who may differ from us on some issues.

The knee jerk reaction is to reduce people to labels:

right/left, Democrat/Republican, conservative/liberal, pro-vax/anti-vax,

Black Lives Matter/All Lives Matter.

This tendency is unhealthy and unhelpful.

Because when we look at others this way, our perception of them is reduced to the label we give.

It keeps us from going deeper and seeing the child of God within.

We never see them as brothers or sisters.

And it precludes any possibility of a conversation that could bring us closer.

Going back to Martin Luther King in Birmingham, he wrote a letter to the public, which among other things

outlined how and why he and his followers decided to take action.
First they got the facts about what was actually happening in Alabama.
Then they reached out.
They met face to face with the very people they hoped to change.
They also made sure their own motivations were pure.
They prayed to rid themselves of anger and hatred
towards those who opposed them.
Then and only then did they take action.
I think this is a model that can help you
in relating to someone you may be struggling to get along with.

SCREEN: pray

When someone has done or said something that upsets you and
you feel a need to respond, first pray.
Pray before you do anything else.
Pray for understanding and love for the person.
And also pray for patience and wisdom for yourself.
Let's be honest, when it comes to hot button issues like those I mentioned,
we all think God is on our side, don't we?
But how likely is that?
Rather than pick sides, Jesus encourages us to do as he did.
Jesus crossed boundaries, he tore down walls,
and he built bridges to be with others.
He told his disciples to follow his example by loving their enemies,
turning the other cheek, and praying for those who persecuted them.
Talk about a reality check!
And none of this is possible without prayer.
Sincere prayer will help reveal your true motivations and help you see
if you need to rid yourself of self centeredness, arrogance or pride.
The only way to succeed in seeing others through God's eyes
is with prayer.
So pray and keep praying.

SCREEN: conversation

And then, be open to opportunities God provides to have a conversation with that person.

And as you've heard me say before, listen more than you talk.

If you are willing to listen with an open mind and heart you can learn a lot about why someone believes as they do.

Or why they did or said what they did.

You might find areas of agreement and common ground that can help you move forward.

Nowadays, very few people make the effort to pray and have a conversation. Instead they immediately react when they don't agree with someone.

They fire off a hurtful text or post on social media.

Sometimes they even cancel the person out of their life.

Again, let's look at how Jesus responded.

When he encountered people he disagreed with - like the Pharisees - he didn't cancel them, he engaged them.

And in those conversations he challenged their behavior, attitudes, and assumptions.

So to follow Jesus's example, we need to make an effort to figure out a person's motivation instead of assuming the worst.

I'm not naive enough to think this will work every time with every person - it won't.

And I know that what I am asking you to do is not easy.

And I'd be lying if I said I've always done this.

I know I haven't, but wished I had.

Because I know it's what God wants for me and what Jesus expects from all his followers.

So now comes the harder question for you:

SCREEN: What is God asking me to do?

What is God asking me to do?

I'll bet God is speaking to your heart right now.

Perhaps bringing to mind someone you need to reconcile with.

Maybe you are thinking of someone you've lost touch with.

God might be challenging you to rethink how you use social media.

Maybe God is reminding you to help someone in need.

Or maybe to take a stand against injustice or intolerance or in defense of life.

What is God asking you to do and how will you respond?

Today, allow the Lord to speak to your heart.

To see the reality of your relationship to others.

Today, let us commit to following Mary's instruction about her son Jesus.

May we do whatever he tells us. Amen +