

Dr. Who Did What?

Text:

Amos 5:24

Luke 4:14-30

A sermon preached by

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday



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Amos 5:24

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Luke 4:14-30

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.' "

And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.





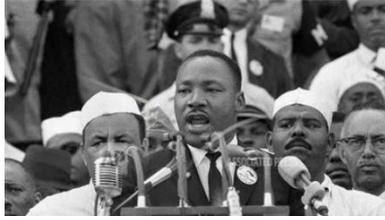
I watched a *Dr. Who* episode this week – probably the first one I’ve seen since the late 1970s. *Dr. Who*, if you don’t know, is a British science fiction TV program produced by the BBC since 1963, featuring a Time Lord who travels through time and space. Over the 50+ years the show has run, The Doctor has been played by 12 different actors with the transition from one to the next written into the plot of the show under the concept of regeneration into a new incarnation. The Doctor travels by a time machine called The Tardis which looks, on the outside, like a typical classic British police call box.



I know a bit about *Dr. Who* because William is a huge fan and talks about it all the time, dressed like The Doctor for Halloween, and drag us on a *Dr. Who* walking tour through London this past summer. You can imagine William’s dismay that I haven’t really seen any of the episodes since the 1970s when the 4th Doctor was in place – now it’s the 12th Doctor – and when I have really very little clue what he’s talking about except for the very basic details.

“But how can he do that?,” I ask William, sometimes just to be annoying. “He can’t do that. What do you mean he gets ‘regenerated’? What’s a sonic screwdriver? I don’t get it.” He rolls his eyes and sighs at my obvious uselessness as a fan. “Dr Who did *what?*,” I’ll ask.

Maybe I need to start watching it more often.



This Sunday, though, my reference to The Doctor is not about Dr. Who but rather about Dr. King – The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I set aside this Sunday closest to his birthday to remember Dr. King in worship not so that we can worship him – because Dr. King as a Baptist preacher knew beyond anything else that only God is to be worshipped – but so that we can remember him and the movement that he led beginning 50+ years ago. And I continue to hold him out as an example of true follower of Jesus that we can emulate and so change the world around us. If we want to, that is.



So, Dr. who? Dr. King. Oh. So Dr. King did what? He changed the world. Without being a Time Lord travelling through time and space in a Tardis, a regenerating non-human who saves many different worlds many different times, our Dr. tried to change the

world following the teachings of the one who brings us together every Sunday morning. Oh, *that* Good Doctor – Dr. King!

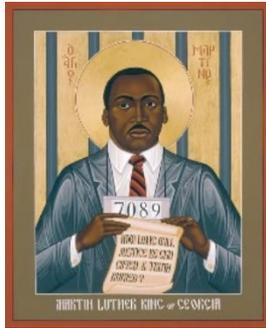


Earlier this year we remembered the 50th Anniversary of the horrible events in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. An organized group of civil rights activists, most of them African-American, tried to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge leaving Selma on a protest march to Montgomery where they were pushing for the right to vote. The first attempt, on March 7, 1965, led by John Lewis and Hosea Williams was met by bloody resistance from state troopers and local men using billy clubs and tear gas. Bloody Sunday. The second attempt on March 9 was led by Dr. King and others and was turned around as they obeyed an injunction and were attempting to get federal protection to go forward.

The 3rd attempt on March 21 was protected by 2,000 federal troops and 1,900 Alabama National Guard, FBI agents, and Federal Marshalls. It successfully began a march to the state capitol with the numbers swelling to 25,000 protestors at the Capitol Building on March 25.



Dr. who did what? Dr. King crossed bridges, Dr. King built bridges, Dr. King brought to the world tangible actions to encourage us to continue the work to which God calls us.



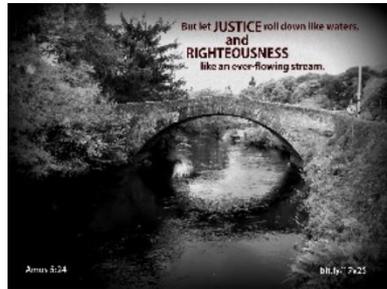
I choose to remember Dr. King on this Sunday each year because I fear that someday we will forget that bridge-building moment in our history which he helped lead, a time of witness and prayer and organizing and action when Americans made progress in ending discrimination and state-sponsored, overt racism. If we begin to forget, our children’s grandchildren may one day be asking that very same question. “Dr. who? And he did what? Dr. who did what?” And they won’t be talking about the Tardis-travelling Dr. Who, who might be in his 25th regeneration by that point. They’ll be asking about Dr. King who could easily be lost to cynics and doubters by then. If we forget, we lose.



Jesus walked into the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth one sabbath and they brought him the Isaiah scroll to read aloud. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jaws dropped, eyes widened, whispers filled the silence, anger stirred in some. "What does he mean by this? Does he think he's something special? He's only Joseph's son."

But we remember that moment, don't we? We remember that teacher, don't we? 2,000 years later we remember and we celebrate and we continue to teach what he brought to light that day, that not only was he to fulfill that Isaiah text, but so also are we to bring God's reign into this world in the very same way Jesus did.



It's all about building bridges and crossing bridges like Dr. King was doing when he was so tragically taken by an assassin's bullet. He had been calling out racism and discrimination and had crossed not only the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma but so many other bridges of distrust and hatred and myth in his short life. By the time he died he was making people uncomfortable as he tied together the 3 evils which continue to dog us today – racism, poverty, and militarism. Yet he chose to cross bridges and build bridges rather than but simply cut bridges off so that each little

island of isolation could drift on its own. No, he called for us work together rather than pull apart.

And he chose to do it under the banner of the Hebrew prophet Amos who calls us to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:24)

And look where we are. Have bridges been crossed?

At that Selma March 50th anniversary gathering at the Edmund Pettis Bridge two iconic photos caught my attention.



President Obama, our first African American President sat holding his wife, Michelle’s, hand as they listened with intensity at those who remembered what that bridge meant, people who have built bridges and crossed them so that we might all be together.



And a second image, President Obama embracing John Lewis who was at the head of that Bloody Sunday march, who was beaten close to death, and who has been a US Congressman from Georgia since 1987. Did Dr. King expect these kinds of bridges only 50 years later? We can’t know. But we’ve come a long way.



Yet we have a long way to go before “justice [can] roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” When we have to reduce human rights and dignity into hashtags like #blacklivesmatter and when others have the audacity to question the legitimacy of that statement, then we still have a long way to go before the bridge is complete. We are still far from the Jesus ideal of “proclaim[ing] release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind [and] let[ting] the oppressed go free.”

I think building bridges and then crossing them is the most important piece of what Jesus calls us to do if we truly believe what he lived his life to show us. Jesus’ message of love and compassion, of bringing Good News to the poor and recovery of sight to the blind, of releasing the captives has everything do with action on our part, on building bridges from here where we are to there where injustice exists.



Many communities and organizations suggest that MLK Day is a day of service rather than just a vacation day so there are lots of opportunities to go out tomorrow and serve where you might never

have considered serving. And that's great. And it honors Dr. King's memory. And is the justice work of Jesus.

But I believe the greater call is to sustain that kind of bridge-building if we are truly working God's kingdom here and now. What I'd rather calls us to is a lifetime of service. Serving God by building bridges through any number of organizations and ideas that change the world by crossing bridges.



Remember Deacon Doris Dalton? She and Tim and the kids moved to White Plains, NY, 2 years ago. She is now Executive Director of the Martin Luther King Institute there in West Chester County. They are changing lives and building bridges. Find a group like that here that is working on racial justice and poverty and inclusion. Join it. Work it.



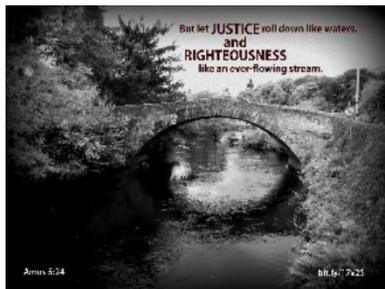
Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. It is still witnessing to the illegal sales of guns from local gun stores that get into our communities and end lives, threatening all of us. It is the movement that I participated in by protesting at a gun store and getting arrested. The portrait of Dr. King that hangs outside the Pastor's Study was what we held that day when the police took us away. Join it. Work it. Build bridges.



Want something immediate? Next Sunday, be a part of our Youth Group participation in Grace Café at Arch Street UMC as we prepare food and serve it to 200 people who come weekly to the church for a warm meal and a few moments of conversation and interaction. Join it. Work it. It builds bridges.



Need something even closer? Hope's very own bridge building ministry – Hope Food Bank – feeds our neighbors bellies and spirits. Once a month food is distributed to those in need. All month long they accept food donations. Every 1st Sunday we collect food in worship. Sort cans, stock shelves, buy vegetable and bread, carry bags to people's cars, laugh and pray with new friends. Join it. Work it. Build the bridge that reaches beyond our buildings.



Dr. What's-his-name – Dr. Who? – No, Dr. King – worked tirelessly to bring God's kingdom to reality, built bridges following the call of Jesus to bring justice, following God's word through Amos to let justice roll down like water. Let's remember that message and live that message. It's our turn to build bridges and then to cross them.

Amen.