

**The Second Sunday After the Epiphany  
MLK Weekend  
January 19, 2014**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

In our Gospel reading this morning we hear the witness of John the Baptist as he observed Jesus on the day after his baptism., “Behold, here is the Lamb of God,” John proclaims. John the Baptist points beyond himself to Jesus and tells his disciples that this is the one he has been talking about: the one who will take away sin; the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist does such a convincing job that the next day, when they see Jesus again, two of John’s disciples, including Andrew, leave John’s entourage to follow Jesus. But when Jesus notices them following him he turns and asks, “What are you looking for?”

That is a question for us: “What are you looking for?” In our spiritual journey there is always something out there ahead of us drawing us forward. There is always something calling us to go beyond where we are now, to leave the status quo and the comfort and security of our lives as we know it to a place of radical fulfillment. Sometimes it is a calling to be healed of past wounds. Sometimes it is a call out of complacency to a life that has meaning. Sometimes it is a call to repair a relationship as a means to find wholeness. Sometimes it is a call to sacrificial service. Sometimes it is a call to a deep and profound relationship with the holy. Sometimes it is a call to seek God’s justice in the world.

This weekend commemorates the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This year ... especially here is St. Augustine which had a pivotal role in the Civil Rights movement ... this year the holiday takes on some special meaning. This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Bill. This afternoon we will commemorate the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at our Vespers service. Tomorrow morning is the annual Martin Luther King breakfast. Tomorrow is the opening of the exhibit at the Visitors’ Center **Journey: 450 Years of the African American Experience.**

For me, this weekend is always special. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of my spiritual heroes. His life, and his death, influenced my decision to enter the ministry. There were other factors at play, and certainly other spiritual heroes, but Martin Luther King’s quest for justice in the face of racism, and his fight for human rights, and his protest against war, and his choice of nonviolence to accomplish peaceful ends certainly were some of the forces that helped form my Christian ethics as I was maturing as a young adult. When I finally asked myself the question, “What am I looking for?” I could see Dr. King’s deep faith as a branch of the path to follow on my spiritual journey.

Many of you know that as a youngster I spent time in North Carolina. In 1951, when I was 7 years old, my family moved from a suburban home on Long Island to a 46 acre farm in racially segregated North Carolina. My father was an executive with a large corporation and had been transferred to Charlotte, and my mother thought the idyllic life of living on the land would be a good life-lesson for me and my five younger siblings. It was a lesson, but not the one my mother had imagined.

We lived in a literal crossroads community with a church, a school ... a school for white children ... and a country store on the corner. When my father inquired about someone to help my mother with the household chores and six children the proprietor of the country store helped him find someone ... but, as my father would tell it, he said in no uncertain terms "You'll pay her no more than \$18 a week, because that all we pay our maids."

Like the neighbors around us we had a tenant house on the farm and that is where Jean, Jean's three children, and Jean's mother lived. As a 7 year old I was only partially troubled by the fact that Jean and her family did not have indoor plumbing; that water came from a hand-pump well in front of her house; that they heated their house and cooked on a wood stove; and that her children went to a different school than I did. And I was confused when Jean's children started school in early August so they could get off in September to pick cotton.

After several years on the farm my family moved from this crossroads community of Weddington, 16 miles south of Charlotte, into the city itself, or at least close enough to the city to access better schools. When we did, Jean came along as a live-in maid, leaving her three children with her mother. A year later my father was transferred to New York City and we moved to Princeton, New Jersey. Jean came with us ... and now her children were 600 miles away, not just 16.

I had no idea that my family was an unsuspecting contributor to what the Pulitzer Prize winning author, Isabel Wilkerson, describes as America's Great Migration in her epic book **The Warmth of Other Suns**. Wilkerson tells the story of several African American from the south who move north for a variety of reasons ... some driven by fear ... some out of desperation. Under Jim Crow in the South there was very little opportunity for any African American, yet it is hard for me to imagine today that my mother paid Jean enough to justify the kind of move she made ... at the cost of leaving her family behind.

Within a year of moving to Princeton Jean had met someone. Jean's was the first wedding I can remember attending ... in the living room of a justice of the peace. The next day she was back making beds, doing laundry, and cooking dinner. She lived with us during the week and with her new husband on weekends ... until we came home from a skiing trip and found a note saying that she and her husband were moving to Philadelphia ... and her children and mother would be joining them.

Even at twelve years old I felt something amiss. My parents always treated Jean with the utmost respect, and expected me and my siblings to do the same. Yet Jean was a “servant,” and I was always troubled that my parents’ values allowed them to ask her to leave her children so she could care for their children. I did not understand until sometime later that it was about a culture that desperately needed to change ... and it would take extreme measures to initiate that change.

A decade later in grad school, with an African American man as my roommate, I read the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 1963 letter from the Birmingham Jail:

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ..."

It would be another few years before I would give up the pursuit of a doctorate in mathematics to attend seminary. By then I had marched against racial segregation and I had protested against the war in Vietnam. At the time I had only a nominal relationship with the church, although I was deeply embedded in a spiritual journey. And I kept asking myself, “What am I looking for?”

I knew I could no longer stand on the outside of institutions and merely criticize. This time the voice I heard was not my own, but the same voice that Andrew and the other disciple heard: “What are you looking for?” I knew that for me to live my life in wholeness ... if I really had “faith” then I had to be willing to see the life, ministry, and death of Jesus as a path for my spiritual journey. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lived his faith in Jesus Christ to the fullest ... even unto death. What was I looking for? A life in which I felt I was contributing to God’s creation, not destroying it. What was I looking for? A way to invite others into a faithful spiritual journey that would play a significant role in them finding healing and wholeness in their lives.

That summer I spent a week at Kanuga, the Episcopal Church’s conference center in the mountains of North Carolina. At the beginning of the week I posted a 3X5 index card on the bulletin board outside the dining hall ... it read, “Wanted: something to do for a year or a lifetime.” By the end of the week I was committed to going to seminary, although I wasn’t sure what a seminary really was.

Our faith is much more than what happens here in church. It has to be about the way we live our lives. As one colleague once phrased it: "Sunday is about an intensive liturgy so that the rest of the week we can live an extensive liturgy." Our faith is about our relationships with each other, and with God, and with the world that God has made. It is about living fully into the image of God, and seeking to find and do the will of God.

So, "What are you looking for?" What is the longing in your heart? What relationship do you want with God, and how, in your life is that expressed? How might you be called to go beyond the status quo and the comfort and security of your life as you know it, to find a place of radical fulfillment? How might you be called to be healed of past wounds? How might you be called out of complacency to a life that has meaning? How might you be called to repair relationships as a means to find wholeness? How might you be called to a deep and profound relationship with the holy? How might you be called to seek God's justice in the world? If Jesus were to ask you, "What are you looking for?" what would be your answer?

Amen.