

**The Second Sunday After the Epiphany  
January 16, 2022**

**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.**

What are you looking for? What are you looking for in your life ... in the world around you, in your relationships with others and with God, and in your relationship with yourself? On this Second Sunday of our Epiphany Season, listening to a story about Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding, and about Paul instruction the Christian community in Corinth about spiritual gifts, what are you looking for? On this weekend commemorating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., what are you looking for?

Each week, we, as a community, come together to worship and praise God. This pandemic has altered the way we do that ... we are now back to being together by YouTube. Yet, many of the elements of our liturgy are still a part of our community life. We listen to the Word of God ... we proclaim our faith ... we offer our prayers ... we share God's peace with each other distantly ... and instead of eating a common meal of sacred food at the communion rail, I receive the holy elements vicariously for the entire congregation.

But what is it that actually defines our faith? Is it being an Episcopalian and worshipping the way that we do? Is it professing our common faith in the ancient words written at the Council of Nicaea, or some other proclamation? Is it the form of our prayers take, or the confession of our sins?

Yes, this is our worship. Certainly, these are essentials of our faith. Surely this is the way that we, in this community, express our devotion to God. Yet, our faith is much more than just the way we worship. It is about the way we live our lives. It is about our relationships with each other, and with God, and with the world that God has made. It is about seeking to do God's will.

In 2008, shortly before I became the Vicar of this congregation, Caren and I facilitated some workshops to discern the future of St. Cyprian's. We articulated then, and have re-affirmed it a number of times since, the Core Values of our expression of the Episcopal Church in this corner of God's vineyard:

St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church proclaims its Christian faith as a community that:

- Is welcoming, diverse and inclusive;
- Is respectful of differing spiritual paths;
- Is a source of healing for the body, mind and spirit;
- Is committed to responding to the needs of others;

- And honors its past as it moves into the future.

This morning I read about Jesus at a wedding in Cana of Galilee from the second chapter of John's gospel. You may remember that the first chapter of John's gospel begins with the Prologue ... "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Following the Prologue is the narrative about Jesus' baptism by John and the several days following the baptism.

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 two days after the baptism, when they see Jesus again, two of John's disciples ... Andrew and his brother Simon Peter ... leave John's entourage to follow Jesus. Then, when Jesus notices Philip and Nathaniel following him Jesus turns and asks, "What are you looking for?" That is the question that the rest of John's gospel aims to answer.

That is also the 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 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. But like most of our public holiday the reason of the long weekend is often lost with only a token tribute to its origin. Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day ... or Indigenous Peoples' Day ... all become times for extended travel of mini-vacations. Only rarely do we give a nod to the events behind them.

However, Dr. King came to St. Augustine in his struggle for racial justice. Dr. King walked the streets of this neighborhood. Dr. King was arrested and jailed in this city. There are people down the street and around the corner who hosted Dr. King in their homes. There are people in this neighborhood who walked beside Dr. King. The people of St. Augustine have good reason to honor this holiday ... they are honoring their struggle as well.

St. Cyprian's is an historically Black church. It was formed in the 1890s when Blacks could not worship with the Whites who attended Trinity Parish downtown on the Plaza. Under the Rev. Peter Williams Cassey, the first Vicar of St. Cyprian's from 1900 to 1917, it grew during some of the worst years of the Jim Crow era. In many ways, St. Cyprian's thrived during the first half of the Twentieth Century. In the 1960s it was a spiritual home for doctors and dentists, teachers and school principals, lawyers and businessmen and women.

Although, for the most part, the people of St. Cyprian's weren't on the front line of the civil rights protests, I've been told by people who were here then that many of the congregation supported the protest efforts with under-the-table financial gifts. As an historically Black church, St. Cyprian's had a stake in the struggle for human rights and racial justice. We, as the inheritors of that legacy have a responsibility to honor the efforts of our spiritual ancestors in this sacred space.

In 1964, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to St. Augustine to support the civil rights and racial justice protests. He tried to have a cup of coffee at a motel restaurant on the bay front. He was arrested. When he was released he went back to the restaurant to try to be seated again. One of his entourage, a young Black man named J. T. Johnson, jumped in the swimming pool, and others followed. Outraged, the motel owner poured muriatic acid into the pool ... with these young Black people in it ... shouting, "I'm cleaning the pool!"

A photo of the incident was front page news around the world. The backlash was enough to end the filibuster ... when a filibuster was a filibuster ... in the United States Congress. The 1964 Civil Rights Accommodations Act was then passed and signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2. That is why the day honoring the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is more than a mere national holiday in St. Augustine. Dr. King's presence here was a watershed moment in the nation's civil rights struggle.

But the story for St. Cyprian's ... and the Lincolnville neighborhood ... did not end there. The White powers-that-be in St. Augustine were angry over the disruption to the status quo, and the significant loss of business, took it out on those who had protested. Blacks in this Lincolnville neighborhood could not get loans to fix up their homes. They were shut out of the labor market. And, the Black college ... Florida Memorial College on West King Street ... lost all local funding and had to relocate to Fort Lauderdale. Many of the men and women in Lincolnville left St. Augustine for education and jobs in friendlier locales.

This of course contributed to the decline of this neighborhood ... and churches like St. Cyprian's. By the 1990s there were only a few elderly women holding this congregation together. From time-to-time Trinity Parish stepped in to offer a priest to lead services. They helped rescue the building in need of major repairs, and a new congregation began to grow again ... a new congregation that included many White people.

In 2006 St. Cyprian's face the crisis of a schism over the role and leadership of LGBTQ persons in the greater Episcopal Church. As we have recovered from that split we have grown significantly, yet our congregation is mostly White. However, that does not negate the fact that we are an historically Black church, and it is our responsibility to honor that legacy that has been bestowed upon us.

Personally, 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. His quest for justice in the face of racism, and his fight for human rights, and his protests against war, and his choice of nonviolence to accomplish peaceful ends, 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 path to follow on my spiritual journey.

Much has been said in the news lately about the vitriolic ... and at times vulgar and profane ... rhetoric that has become a part of our political process. I believe we must put an end to hateful rhetoric that has become the norm. However, I also believe that we ... as peacemakers ... must actively promote nonviolence and understanding. On this Sunday of the weekend honoring the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I think his words can still act as a guidepost.

In 1957, reflecting on the Montgomery, Alabama Boycott, King said:

*"The nonviolent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent but rather seeks to win his friendship and understanding. ... The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community."*

I know I have told this story many times before, but I believe it is worth repeating. In 1951 my family moved from a suburban home on Long Island, New York to a 46-acre farm in racial segregated North Carolina. My father was an executive with a large corporation and had been transferred to Charlotte, and my mother thought the idyllic setting 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.

Like neighbors around us we had a tenant house on the farm and that is where Jean ... our new household maid ... Jean's three children, and Jean's mother lived. At eight or nine years-old I was only partially troubled by the fact that Jean and her family did not have indoor plumbing; that water came from an open well with a hand pump 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. I was confused when Jean's children started school in early August so they could get off in September to pick cotton. Yet, in spite of the difference in the color of our skins, I became close friends with Jean's son Robert who was a year older than I.

It wasn't until a neighboring classmate of mine, Bobby Simpson, shot Robert with a BB gun that I really understood the racism that permeated this small rural crossroad 20 miles south of Charlotte. As Robert cried from the pain and humiliation I angrily confronted Bobby ... and in defense he arrogantly claimed, "I'm allowed to shoot him, he's a ..." and he used the "N" word. At nine years old I didn't yet know about nonviolence, so I'm still proud to say that Bobby Simpson went home that day with a

bloody nose. However, I don't think my actions changed Bobby Simpson's mind about Robert and others who shared Robert's skin color.

Over a decade later in grad school, with a Black man as my roommate, I read the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 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."*

In a later speech, Dr. King phrased it this way:

*The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be... The nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.*

It would be years later that 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 Simon Peter, and Philip, and Nathaniel, and the other disciples 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 of Nazareth 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.

Our faith is much more than just the way we worship. It has to be about the way we live our lives. It is about our relationships with each other, and with God, and with the world that God has made. It is about seeking to do God's will.

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? Who are your role models ... your heroes of faith? How have you lived your life as a legacy of those spiritual ancestors who have gone before you? If Jesus were to ask you, "What are you looking for?" what would be your answer?

Yes, I certainly believe we must put an end to the hateful rhetoric that has become the norm in our political discourse. At times when we find ourselves in deep disagreement with ... or distress over ... an idea it can be powerfully enticing to feel hateful, and to express that hate. Unfortunately, that does little to change the idea or improve the discourse around it. Instead, we must continue to reject hate and all its expressions, including racism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and intolerance. I believe that we as peacemakers must actively seek out ways to promote nonviolence and understanding. It is not enough to just be passive in the face of violence ... even verbal violence. We must find peaceful ways to promote acceptance, and tolerance, and respect of differences of all kinds.

Speak with care ... work in positive ways ... share messages of hope ... bring people together. We make the difference ... we can make things better. If we want to honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ... if we want to honor the legacy that has been handed to us from our Black spiritual ancestors in this sacred place ... we will find peaceful ways to promote acceptance, and tolerance, and respect of differences of all kinds in the world around us.

I end with one last quote from Dr. King:

*Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.*

So, what are you looking for in your life ... in the world around you, in your relationships with others and with God, and in yourself? This is the questions Jesus asked his disciples ... and he asks us today.

Amen.