



WORDS OF VISION, WORDS OF POWER

READINGS FOR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

The third Monday in January was designated a federal holiday in the United States in 1983 in recognition of the birthday of slain civil rights leader, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK). Long before this official recognition, however, churches and community civil rights organizations observed January 15, or the Sunday closest to that date, as a day of remembrance and celebration of Dr. King. Below are two dramatic readings based on words and writings of Dr. King. Either reading may be incorporated into worship, perhaps along with other scripture readings, to refresh our memory of Dr. King's remarkable contribution to equality, justice, and peace.

Reader's Theater: Words from the Bible and from Dr. King

Reader 1: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. . . . For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'" (*Psalms 137:1, 3*)

Reader 2: "I have stood in a meeting with hundreds of youngsters and joined in while they sang "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round." It is not just a song; it is a resolve. . . . These songs bind us together, give us courage together, help us march together." (MLK, "Why We Can't Wait")

All Readers: For the power of songs and songs of power, we give you thanks, O God.

Reader 1: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father [and Mother] in heaven; for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." (*Matthew 5:43-44*)

Reader 2: "Let us therefore not think of our movement as one that seeks to integrate into all the existing values of American society. Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved country to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness." (MLK, "Where Do We Go from Here?")

All Readers: **For your realm, which stands beyond and against all nations, and your justice, which judges all people, we give you thanks, O God.**

Reader 1: “Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out to the field.’ And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then God said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ And God said, ‘What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!’” (*Genesis 4:8–10*)

Reader 2: “The person who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as the one who helps perpetrate it. The person who accepts evil without protesting against it, is really cooperating with it.” (*MLK, “Stride toward Freedom,” adapted*)

All Readers: **For the continuing witness of the life and ministry of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose blood cries from the ground to you and to us, we give you thanks, O God.**

Readers Theater: Excerpts from Dr. King’s Speech “I Have a Dream”

Reader 1: “Even though we must face difficulties to today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal.”

Reader 2: “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons [and daughters] of former slaves and sons [and daughters] of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood [and sisterhood.]”

Reader 2: “I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Reader 1: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

Reader 2: “This will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning—‘my country, ’tis of thee; sweet land of liberty; of the I sing; land where my fathers died; land of the pilgrim’s pride; from every mountainside, let freedom ring.’”

Reader 1: “When we allow freedom to ring from every town and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children—black men [and women] and white men [and women,] Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual”:

All Readers: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”



For "Readers Theater: Words from the Bible and Dr. King," Dr. King's words were adapted by permission of Edward Ernest Goode, Black Clergy Group of the Metropolitan Association, New York Conference, United Church of Christ.

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These resources were originally part of *Leadership File*, 1996, developed by the Office of Church Life and Leadership, UCC. They were adapted by Diane Ford-Jones, minister for communication and mission education with Justice and Witness Ministries: A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ. For more information about Martin Luther King Jr. Day, contact her by phone at 216.736.3704 or by e-mail at fordjond@ucc.org.

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