

Chris Murphy

January 15, 2023

Scripture: Luke 4: 14-30

Sermon Title: The Beloved Community

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning as we celebrate the life and contribution of Martin Luther King Jr., I am reminded of the great contribution of the Black Church in historic Christianity.

Story of Mission Trip in St. Louis with Robert and Shawn Parrish...

- Christianity at its best emphasizes experiential relationship with the Trinity- God as Parent, Jesus, and Holy Spirit and social justice- a special heart for those who are oppressed, working for equality, human rights, and the gift of community. The Black Church historically has done this well. I think they have done this better than many churches that are predominantly white.

Today, I want to remind us of Martin Luther King Jr.'s idea of The Beloved Community. Rather than summarize in my own words King's vision for community. I want to read from the King Center website. The King Center is an organization started with the help and leadership of King's wife Coretta Scott

King and the entire King family to continue King's legacy and teachings. According to the King Center,

"The Beloved Community" is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world.

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human

decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

As early as 1956, Dr. King spoke of The Beloved Community as the end goal of nonviolent boycotts. As he said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the

seats on Montgomery's busses, "the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men."

I find this description of the Beloved Community provided by the King Center to be quite inspiring as we seek to do ministry together as a church community in Newberg and the surrounding communities around us.

Newberg needs to embrace the vision of a Beloved Community where everyone is loved, accepted, and celebrated as sacred to God and each other.

In our Scripture today, we hear Jesus reading the words from Isaiah 61, "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."

This message from Jesus is at first welcomed by his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, but then Jesus goes on to share that no prophet is accepted in his hometown. He tells a story about Elijah and Elisha, how they both were sent to

care for gentiles. Elijah was sent to Zarephath in Sidon and Elisha was sent to Naaman the Syrian.

Jesus implies that the Holy Spirit is giving him good news that will extend beyond the community of Israel to gentiles. Jesus is concerned that the people in Nazareth wish to confine him to do miracles only for people like them.

The story goes on to say the people in Jesus' hometown turn on him and even try to kill Jesus by throwing him off a cliff. He escapes, but continues to fear for his safety. Eventually Jesus pays the ultimate price of his life by teaching God's love for all.

As we read this story today, I cannot help think about Martin Luther King Jr. He was killed by teaching people to love and not hate. He was killed for preaching nonviolence and peace to one's neighbors both in the United States and around the world. He preached love and nonviolence and people could not handle it.

Like Jesus he wanted the good news to be inclusive of all people and like Jesus, King faced persecution from people whose hearts were too small. King experienced threats on his life for years and finally was assassinated in 1968 for preaching a message of love. In his book *Strength to Love*, King writes,

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” And in King’s reflection on Jesus from this same book *Strength to Love*, he shares, ““Every time I look at the cross I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. I am reminded of the beauty of sacrificial love and the majesty of unswerving devotion to truth.” King models for us what sacrificial love looks like and he learned this value from the sacrificial love of Jesus.

We may wish to believe that today we are moving beyond a time of racism and fear in society and in our world. Some of us were hopeful that we were showing progress towards a vision of the Beloved Community especially when Barack and Michelle Obama arrived at the white house with their wonderful daughters Malia and Sasha in 2008. However modern historians are actually suggesting that since 2008, we have noticed a strong reaction of racism and hate that suggests we still have great work to do to see the beloved community fully realized on earth.

In our own town in Newberg, I have spoken to people just in this last year who once were leaders in our town and who now have chosen to move out of Newberg out of fear. One of my friends did not feel his family was safe in our town because he was black. Another friend of mine left because her daughter was

being bullied for identifying as transgender. We are losing leaders in key leadership roles in our town who are people of color because Newberg continues to struggle to be an open and loving community for all people.

Thankfully, I am happy to share that I am also noticing a movement towards peace and unity among some groups in town. I think the Civility project led by Ron Mock and others is a great effort to bring people together. The civility project encourages people to build relationship while exploring differences of opinion. Denise Bacon, our former city councilor who recently passed away due to illness was a supporter of the Civility Project and also led her own efforts toward peace and unity in Newberg. I have been invited with other local citizens to carry on this effort. Our church's Newberg Peace Garden here on the back of our church campus is a peace project to bring healing to our community by creating a space for prayer, reflection, and community. Our monthly prayer retreats are open to the community to help foster peace and rest and we plan to hold other events in the future to use our Peace Garden to bring healing to our community.

There is hope here in Newberg, but we need to understand what it means to be the Beloved Community. We need to embrace the sacredness of every person and all of creation. We all are created in the image of God. We are equally loved

by God. The church must always stand for peace, unity, and justice for all people and embrace the truth that love is the answer. We need to celebrate our diversity.

Coming out of Christmas, I was reflecting on how Jesus our Savior, is our God of love coming down to us in the incarnation as love revealed to us. As we begin a new year, I am reminded that just as we can say Jesus saves us, so we can say that because God is love and Jesus is God. Then Jesus is love. Therefore it is right to say that Love saves us.

Wherever we see love, we see the Spirit of God at work. Love saves us. Love heals our wounds as a community. We are called to live out the ethic of love, as King said to have the strength to love and so fulfill God's purposes for Newberg, our broader community, and the world.

Coretta Scott King worked tirelessly for our country to eventually create a holiday in honor of her husband. She wanted his teaching and the justice teaching of the entire civil rights community to continue to inspire future generations, so that the Beloved Community would be a reality.



Friends, let us by faith in the power of God, the power of love revealed in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to live out King's dream for a beloved community where everyone finds a home.

In the Name of God who is Mother and Father to us all, In the Name of Jesus the Son, and in the Name of the Holy Spirit we pray. AMEN.