

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SUNDAY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“A DREAM REALIZED”
Psalm 30:5
January 18, 2009
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

The dream that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of in his speech, *"I Have a Dream"*, delivered on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. was in his own words, **"deeply rooted in the American dream"**. He went on to say that **"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 are created equal." "I have a dream that one day....."** Well, that **"one day"** has finally arrived. Dr. King saw this day as a hope deeply rooted in the American dream. In spite of the long and ugly history of slavery and the horrors that followed it, America was trying to become the America that Dr. King envisioned. He could say with David the Psalmist, *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* It's morning time in America!

When the polls closed on Tuesday, November 4, 2008 what was once only a dream became a reality. On Tuesday of this week, President Elect Barack Obama will be sworn in as the 44th president of the United States. **"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 are created equal." This is a dream that is "deeply rooted in the American dream"**.

Franklin D. Roosevelt called it the **"New Deal"**. John F. Kennedy called it the **"New Frontier"**. Lyndon Baine Johnson called it **"The Great Society"**. Martin Luther King, Jr. called it **"The Beloved Community"**. That is, my Friends, the American Dream.

Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese-American, who was deeply involved in Black Power movement had this to say about Martin Luther King:

“King constantly pointed out to those in the freedom movement that their refusal to respond in kind to the violence and terrorism of their opponents was increasing their own strength and unity. He reminded them and the world that their goal was not only the right to sit at the front of the bus or to vote, but to give birth to a new society based on more human values. In so doing, he not only empowered those on the front lines, but in the process developed a strategy for transforming a struggle for rights into a struggle that advances the humanity of everyone in the society and thereby brings the beloved community closer to realization. This is what true revolutions are about. They are about redefining our relationships with one another, to the Earth and to the world; about creating a new society in the places and spaces left vacant by the disintegration of the old; about hope, not despair; about saying yes to life and no to war; about finding the courage to love and care for the peoples of the world as we love and care for our own families. King's revolutionary vision is about each of us becoming the change we want to see in the world.”

It was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who gave the wake-up call to America to live out its creed that all men are created equal. Forty-one years after the assassination of Dr. King we are now prepared to live in the beloved community he dreamed about; the dream that was deeply rooted in the American dream.

Look around you this morning. This is the fulfillment of the dream; the beloved community. We share an experience of diversity here that very few other places of worship can match. That is why we can celebrate the excitement of this week with the world. Because of our history here we have much to teach America. If Dr. King had lived, he would have been able to witness the fulfillment of what was promised in the Constitution of the United States of America.

Dr. Carlton Babbs, was the pastor of this congregation when the decision was made to integrate the church. He would have been excited about the inauguration of the first African American to be elected as President of the United States. He too had a dream that was **“deeply rooted in the American dream”**. He decided one day to embrace the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said, **“Now is the time to make real the promises**

of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.”

Dr. Babbs discovered how costly it is to do what God calls us to do. He was determined to make Dr. King's words live when he said, **“The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.”**

And neither can we worship alone. Dr. Babbs was committed to a cause larger than himself. He chose his course of action in spite of the danger. He was on the front lines of human justice doing his part to serve others. He believed in the dream.

We live in a time of paradox, contradiction, opportunity, and above all, change. To the fearful, change is threatening. To the hopeful, change is encouraging. To those who have confidence in themselves, change is a stimulus because they believe one person can make a difference and influence what goes on around them. Dr. Babbs was that change for Park Hill when he led this church to integrate.

Prejudice is morally inexcusable. Howard Thurman was a great African American theologian. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., read Howard Thurman's little book, ***“Jesus and the Disinherited”***, many times. He traveled with it almost as often as he traveled with his bible. In the book, Thurman tells the story of a time when he was traveling on a train and sat down across from an elderly white woman. The woman promptly pointed towards him and said to the conductor, **“What is that doing here?”**

Amazingly quick on his feet, the conductor creatively replied, **“That has a ticket.”**

Thurman relates that, **“For the next fifty miles this lady talked for five or ten or fifteen minutes with each person who was seated alone in that**

coach, setting forth her philosophy of human relationships and the basis of her objection to my presence in the car. I was able to see the atmosphere in the entire car shift from common indifference to active recognition of and, to some extent, positive resentment of my presence; an ill will spreading its virus by contagion”

Everyone lives in relationships. We must live with ourselves, and then we must live with others. There is no escaping that fact. Truman Capote, the author of “In Cold Blood” grew up in Monroeville, Alabama, a rather small town. After being abandoned by his mother and father, Capote was raised by a group of elderly aunts. One year, for Halloween, young Truman convinced his aunts to throw a costume party for the neighborhood children and their parents. First on the guest list was Truman’s neighbor, Harper Lee, an imaginative young girl who would grow up to write the American classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Truman also invited another neighbor to the party, a reclusive young man named Sonny Boular. Sonny rarely left his house. Local children speculated that he was a crazy man, and that if you went on his property, he would come after you with a knife. Sonny would later serve as the inspiration for Boo Radley, one of the pivotal characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Now the rumor that went around Monroeville was that the elderly aunts were inviting Black people to the party. In the strictly segregated world of the 1930s, this was simply unacceptable to some people. So the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan made plans to march to the town square in protest of the Halloween party. On the night of the party, a Klan member caught sight of a young person dressed in an elaborate, home-made robot costume. Having convinced themselves that such an elaborate costume was hiding a Black person, one Klan member laid hold of the guest and began pulling him towards the town square. The party guests chased the Klan down and reclaimed their young guest. To their surprise, they discovered that the elaborately-dressed robot was none other than Sonny Boular. The young recluse had actually come to the party! There were many influential townspeople in attendance at the Halloween party, and they were outraged that the Klan had raised such a ruckus and scared this young man who had just wanted to attend a party. The Klan members left in shame. From that day on, the KKK lost a great deal of power and influence in Monroeville, Alabama. -- George Plimpton, *Truman Capote* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 20-22.

It is so easy to give in to our baser emotions; to hate; to seek revenge when someone has wronged us; to ignore the plight of the poor. But there is a man hanging on the cross who says to us, I have loved you with a love that can only be repaid one way, ***“Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”***

Today we remember the legacy of Dr. King. If you are ready to be a part of the **“Beloved Community”** of which Dr. King spoke, I would love to be your pastor because I believe his dream was **“deeply rooted in the American dream”**.