

What is Mine to Do? Sunday Service on MLK weekend January 16, 2022

What is mine to do?

(Read parts of DAILY WORD from 1/13, 1/14, 1/15, 1/16, 1/17)

One powerful aspect of working at a high school for the past four years is that teenagers pretty much have a contract with the universe to be hypocrisy detectors. While they may not always own up to their own blind spots, if we let them, they challenge the adults in their lives to walk our talk, to *not* settle for “Do what I say, not what I do.” My students continuously pushed me to break open my assumptions and comfortable ways of seeing the world.

Last year at school when we marked the birth of Dr. King, it followed the tumultuous-- to say the least-- year of 2020; the year of Covid and lockdown, the year of recognizing what the earth looked like when our human activities on it came to a stop during the lockdown, the year of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the year of a fraught election, the year of polarizing divisions that still reverberate today.

In that high school setting, especially in front of 145 young people whose hearts were heavy with the weight of all of the above, what was mine to do as their white, middle-aged, loving, campus minister? Those trusting, hurting young BS detectors surely did NOT need me to speak in a way that ignored what they were facing in their own lives, in their communities, and in our country at large. And yet as their elder, their teacher-- as their minister-- I also surely could NOT leave them mired in hopelessness! I promise, I won't leave us in hopelessness either!

The steadfast champion of civil rights John Lewis said, “Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what [Martin Luther King] called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.”

Like Dr. King, John Lewis was part of a generation that fought for Civil Rights. Their generation's work laid the groundwork for *this* generation of young people to find hope in activism. My students often led the way for us to begin meaningful work and

conversation around issues they care deeply about: racial equity and justice, gender inclusion language and policy, “people first” language for those with intellectual, physical or mental health challenges, an openness to finding religious unity within our diversity of belief and practice, and an urgency of taking better care of our spinning blue planet.

What was mine to do in that setting was to listen. To guide. To be willing to feel my own discomfort and see what it had to teach me. To learn together how to have difficult conversations with a little more skill. To enlarge my thinking, *and* push my students to reflect deeply--to learn about ourselves as we engaged with the world. In many ways that is still at the heart of what is mine to do. So I’m going to pull a Dennis Ryan now from his talk this summer, “*You would know this if...*” and point us toward this month's Unity Magazine. Thanks to Roger for sharing the following article with me, that invited my deep dive into its pages.

In the beautiful and challenging article ***Where Will You Stand*** by Rev Ogun Holder, he asks us to reflect on more than the often quoted words of Dr. King, “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear; Darkness cannot drive out Darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Those words resound on so many levels! Yet Holder reminds us of King’s words that provoke the kind of discomfort that just might transform us: (with a nod to those young folks, I’ve taken liberties and changed “he” to “they”)

“They who passively accept evil are as much involved in it as they who helped to perpetrate it. They who accept evil without protesting against it are really cooperating with it. The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people... who are more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefer a negative peace that is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

What is mine to do?

“Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Romans 12: 2

In the article ***A New Thought About New Thought***, Rev Jacquie Fernandez teaches into this passage from Romans. She challenges us to see in a new way our affirmations and denials, our understanding that we are co-creators with God. Fernandez writes,

“Be *transformed* by the *renewing* of your minds-- have a new thought.

The teaching in this verse is infinitely deeper than merely manifesting parking spaces. The power of thought to create a reality requires that we replace limiting thoughts with Truth and know our divine inheritance. The renewing of the mind will necessarily result in a transformative experience; you will be changed by what you hold in consciousness...This work is deep, it can be very difficult, and it will very likely challenge the depth of your faith. Take heart:... You will be established in the law of love’s perfection, transformed by the renewing of your mind. Whether or not your outer world changes your perception and understanding of it certainly will – and that new thought is the one that will change everything.

I recognize that my relationship with Unity principles and practices are just beginning, and the power, and perspective of these two articles resonated deeply with my own questions, and where I feel called to grow. And yet it was the way their messages interacted in my heart with ***Liberation as a Pathway to Love*** by Rev Kelly Isola that will be my food for thought, prayer and meditation.

“If you've ever been touched by liberation, then you know why you must commit to it and be disciplined in your own walk to liberation – for it is the only way *all* can have liberation... Liberation is a radical pathway, one where the power lies within ourselves to question everything we think... Liberation is creating a culture of caretaking, a culture with love as its central value. If we miss opportunities to do this, then we miss opportunities to liberate ourselves. We miss knowing who and what we are, and knowing that our birthright is exactly love.”

So, what is mine to do? What is *OURS* to do? We say these words every week:

A world transformed through the spiritual awakening of all. We awaken to and embrace the Divine essence of all beings through prayer and service in our community and in the world. We affirm the Oneness of all of creation in all loving goodness of God.

Dr. King was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's commitment to the principle of ahimsa, non-violence. This commitment led both men not to an absence of tension, but to work for a peace that holds justice. Neither denied the darkness they saw in the hearts and workings of the world, but they called to each of us to bring light to the darkness. There are two other teachings from Hinduism that help me here: a recognition of the stages of life, and our call to walk our path of dharma, our sacred purpose. What some of my teenage students are called to do as they discover their sacred purpose may look very different from what my parents are called to do, or what I am called to do, or my adult children are called to do.

At the heart of our vision and mission is a call to the paradox of BEING and DOING. We pray in a trust that affirms our birthright to walk in love, that affirms our co-creation with Power and Presence of God. And from the depths of our being, we are called into discomfort. Into our own disciplined walk into liberation from our thought habits, and toward our full awakening. And then into bringing that awakening into every moment of our lives, into every interaction. Each day we greet the morning, greet the evening, and pray into, live into, rest into...the love that guides our way into answering *What is mine to do?*

Let me close with a prayer from Maya Angelou:

Prayer by Maya Angelou

Father, Mother, God,

Thank you for your presence

during the hard and mean days.

For then we have you to lean upon.

Thank you for your presence

during the bright and sunny days,

for then we can share that which we have

with those who have less.

And thank you for your presence
during the Holy Days, for then we are able
to celebrate you and our families
and our friends.

For those who have no voice,
we ask you to speak.

For those who feel unworthy,
we ask you to pour your love out
in waterfalls of tenderness.

For those who live in pain,
we ask you to bathe them
in the river of your healing.

For those who are lonely, we ask
you to keep them company.

For those who are depressed,
we ask you to shower upon them
the light of hope.

Dear Creator, You, the borderless
sea of substance, we ask you to give to all the
world that which we need most—Peace.

May it be so! And so it is, AMEN!