

Service of Prayers of Intercession for Martin Luther King, Jr.

Opening:

“Prayer was a wellspring of strength and inspiration during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the movement, we prayed for greater human understanding. We prayed for the safety of our compatriots in the freedom struggle. We prayed for victory in our nonviolent protests, for brotherhood and sisterhood among people of all races, for reconciliation and the fulfillment of the Beloved Community.

For my husband, Martin Luther King, Jr. prayer was a daily source of courage and strength that gave him the ability to carry on in even the darkest hours of our struggle. I remember one very difficult day when he came home bone-weary from the stress that came with his leadership of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In the middle of that night, he was awakened by a threatening and abusive phone call, one of many we received throughout the movement. On this particular occasion, however, Martin had had enough.

After the call, he got up from bed and made himself some coffee. He began to worry about his family, and all of the burdens that came with our movement weighed heavily on his soul. With his head in his hands, Martin bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud to God: "Lord, I am taking a stand for what I believe is right. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I have nothing left. I have come to the point where I can't face it alone.

Later he told me, "At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear a voice saying: 'Stand up for righteousness; stand up for truth; and God will be at our side forever.'" When Martin stood up from the table, he was imbued with a new sense of confidence, and he was ready to face anything.”

- From *Standing in the Need of Prayer* by Coretta Scott King

Hymn – Every Time I Feel the Spirit

Refrain:

Every time I feel the Spirit
moving in my heart I will pray.
Yes, every time I feel the Spirit
moving in my heart I will pray.

1. Upon the mountain, when my Lord spoke,
Out of God's mouth came fire and smoke.
Looked all around me, it looked so fine,
Till I asked my Lord if all was mine.
(Refrain)

2. Jordan river, chilly and cold,
It chills the body but not the soul.
There is but one train upon this track;
It runs to heaven and then right back.
(Refrain)

Scripture:

Genesis 37:18—20

They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer. Now is our chance; let us kill him and throw him into one of these pits and say that a wild beast has devoured him. Then we shall see what will become of his dreams".

Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." ³The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. ⁴Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. ⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. ⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Prayer:

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." With these words of Martin Luther King, let us come to God in prayer:

God of all races and nations, we praise you for all your faithful servants who have done justice, loved mercy, and walked humbly with their God. For apostles, martyrs, leaders, and saints, and for humble folk whose names were never in the news, but are recorded in your book of life, we give you thanks. Hear us as we name, aloud or in silence, the servant-leaders who have touched our lives:

We thank you especially for Martin Luther King Jr., for his courage and conviction, for his passion for peace, and for his tireless quest of a nation that keeps faith with its promises. Hear us as we pray for our nation:

We cry out for children, women, and men of every race who are denied education, health care, jobs, housing, and hope in our land. Hear us now as we pray for those in our own community and around the world, who are lonely and desperate, who are sick in body and soul, who are weary from pain and in need of your healing touch:

We grieve together for nameless multitudes who suffered the tortures of slavery and the tyranny of oppression, who were beaten, raped, and lynched; and for the nameless multitudes today whose lives are stunted and cut short by economic and social structures of brutality. Hear us as we pray for those in the world who suffer from injustice: ¹

And now unto him who is able to keep us from falling, and lift us from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy, to him be power and authority, forever and ever. Amen.²

Benediction:

I refuse to believe
that humankind is so tragically bound
to the starless midnight of racism and war
that the bright daybreak of peace
and sisterhood and brotherhood can never become a reality. . . .
I believe
that unarmed truth and unconditional love
will have the final word.
We proclaim the saving peace of Almighty God.
Amen.³

¹ Prayer resources from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program

² From *Paul's Letter to American Christians* by Martin Luther King, Jr.

³ From UCC Worship Ways, <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/ww51-5.pdf>