

Thank you, Dan.

Pivoting now into this next little bit of our reflective pause together
I ask you to close your eyes with me for a moment
Wherever you are,
Breathing in
And out,
Continuing in...

Bringing our awareness – down and in
to the divine beauty of being,
simply belonging here,
together,
– in this moment.

Breathing in,
not just an awareness of the concept
but a feeling – a shared full body present feeling –
of being Home,
of being at Home in this world together
everyone One.

Dear God – everyday! –
breathing in, we invite you:
Kum Ba Yah.
Come by here.
Be with us.
In us.

How privileged I feel –
And I use that word privilege advisedly –
How privileged I feel to be called by Dan to share today

In the prologue of her book “The Journey” Lillian Smith confesses:
“As I write,

I am thinking of a morning when I was in the clay room at my camp watching the children work.

There they were:

each with a lump of clay, smoothing, pulling and turning,
picking a little off, pressing a smidge on,
until it changed – slowly
into an image of something they dimly saw and felt.

So gravely they worked.

One little girl said,

I am making something nobody in the world has ever seen.

And when it was done,
it was her own small face.

She was right. No one had seen it before
for it was herself as she felt, herself,
with her secrets spelled and misspelled in the clay.”

For the next few minutes

I'll aim to share a bit

not as a lesson

but simply to share a bit of my own life's "little lump of clay" that I dimly see
and feel. I hope it might have a small bit of meaning for you.

Indeed, what an honor to be asked to speak,
on the eve of our nation's official holiday celebrating

The Very Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

One who was no stranger to these grounds, being served at the lodge in
March of 1962 before his speech at E.C. Glass.

What I hope to share is really quite simple.

It's not news,

though it's born out of Good News.

It's not mine, most of what I have to share

flows from the clearly embodied, powerfully Good life
of Dr. Martin Luther King

and of other beloved servant leaders we know

Indeed, I learned it by watching many of you.

And yet we struggle –
we all struggle –
to really get a hold of these simple things.

So, it deserves our attention – until we really do.

Three simple things, sprouting out anew from my Epiphany epiphany:

1. Live in Prayer.
2. Love through Brave Action.
3. Cultivate our world by Being, Belonging & Becoming – together.

Epiphany – January 6th

It's three Kings' Day, and also the day John baptized Jesus.

Derived from the Greek word epiphaneia
meaning "manifestation"

It was both the first physical manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles,
represented by the visit of the three wise men after Jesus' birth,

AND

the manifestation of his divinity
through his baptism in the Jordan River
and at his first miracle (for all you wine lovers).

Epiphany is a big deal in Christianity,
up there with Christmas and Easter.

It says two things:

Christ, the Jewish Messiah, came for the salvation of the whole wide World.

And

It proclaims the Earthly One-ness
of Divinity – God – in Humanity – man & womankind.

And non-religiously,
epiphanies are big deals

BY DEFINITION.

Webster defines epiphanies as:

- usually sudden manifestations or perceptions of the essential nature or meaning of something.
- an intuitive grasping of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking.
- an illuminating discovery or realization

We've had an Epiphany alright.

And yet strangely,
it's an epiphany this nation has had so many times before.

This simple –
and literally – striking epiphany of 2021
is simply another chapter in the old played out,
hate-filled,
fear-based
scarcity-perceiving story of
our American Capitalist system.

We've seen this tragic movie too many times before.

In the beautiful community video that Dan just put out
of all of you
standing up against racism,
standing up for our Democracy
I know you all noticed Dolly & Will
So beautiful there – our own committed Camp Kum-Ba-Yah love birds –
Both so gentle and kind
Standing firm denouncing racism, and –
Did you see Dolly's sign?
"Create the Beloved Community"

That was Dr. King's life mission.

On April 4, 1967, in his “Beyond Vietnam” speech
44 years and 1 day before my oldest son Julian was born,
Dr. King remarked at Riverside Church:

“A time comes when silence is betrayal.”

It’s certainly no epiphany to say
that the time has long,
long since past
to denounce American Racism &
fix the brokenness of it’s co-conspirator
our American Capitalist System.

And while the truth of these words is beyond doubt,
we’ve had the Epiphany again.

January 6, 2021. Washington, D.C.
just a few blocks from where I used to live
The violent storming of the heart-seat of our American Democracy.
Like De Ja Vu all over again,
we had our national epiphany – again –
for the whole world to see.

And just a few days later here in Lynchburg on the following Sunday,
Here on Boonsboro Rd just 1 week ago
Freshly in the shameful wake of the January 6th attacks on the US Capital –
an insurgency against our democracy stoked by our sitting president – it was
a tale of two churches.

On the one Dan’s voice unmistakably, NOT SILENT :)
Deep cries out to Deep.

But just down the road, in another Sunday service
only a very subtle, implied reference to the events of Epiphany 2021.

No specific acknowledgement.

No direct denunciation.

Silence.

Indeed therefore, Betrayal.

And it's not just the Capitol violence on January 6,
but the continued systemic discrimination & violence against people of color
and other marginalized groups that sparked protests in
and almost defined 2020 America,
overshadowing the worst global pandemic in a century.

It's not just a few conservative churches,
but we see now – still in 2021
a great many people we know, many whom indeed we know & love well,
holding on to hate
likewise many organizations in our midst continue to hide behind
excuses of “uncertainty” or the brazen old embrace of discrimination
cowering in silence.

Since living abroad, I've been able to see more clearly some of the broken
aspects of our little American world.

Two of my favorite epiphanies:

Mark Twain said:

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness,
and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts.

Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired
by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.”

A century later, writer Lillian Smith said

“I soon realized that no journey carries one far unless, as it extends into the
world around us, it goes an equal distance into the world within us.”

Where have you travelled?
Or perhaps more confrontingly,
Where won't you travel?
What word won't you hear?
What won't you say?
And what does that silence say?

Indeed many of us resist traveling "down & in" to speak to ourselves.
Even if we travel outwardly,
we often dare not bring the outward lesson
down & in to our hearts where the real work can happen.
Like an evil outer armor,
the pervasive social sickness of American Successfulism
which makes the current covid crisis pale in comparison
conspires to keep the work
that travelling across boundaries & divisions can do
from cultivating & fertilizing the heart of our souls.

I've noticed when the word Capitalism or Capitalist comes up, immediately
most start to get defensive.
Bristling up inside at the very sound: American Capitalism
As if an attack on the that which their body & mind worship is imminent
A wall starts to form up.
Conversation gets curt, closing down.
Unwilling to admit
that undeniably broken parts of America's machinery & culture need fixing.
A desire for Silence.
Complicity.
Betrayal.

And yet as Christians or moralist or even simply as citizens,
how are we being, when our voices are not speak up now?
how are we being, when our actions are not speaking out now?
Indeed how gravely we betray our fellow humans – all of them
when we acquiesce now, when we say nothing.

It's only by going inside –
by having the courage & safe guarding the time
to Live in Prayer
to reflect – for ourselves – on how we are being,
on what we are taking IN FROM –
not just seeing during our life's travels
that we might dismantle prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness that
exists inside ourselves.

John the Baptist, living in prayer, both spoke up for what he thought right –
when Jesus came to be baptized:
“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”
“It's proper to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”
And taking it inside out, he did.
An example of Life in Prayer.

At Riverside in 1967, Dr. King confessed:
“I must be true to my conviction that I share with all men
the calling to be a son of the living God.
Beyond the calling of race
or nation
or creed
is this vocation of sonship & daughtership, brotherhood & sisterhood,
and because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned
especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children,
I come tonight to speak for them.
This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us
who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties
which are broader and deeper than nationalism
and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions.
We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless,
for the victims of our nation
and
for those it calls "enemy,"

for no document
from human hands
can make these humans any less our brothers & sisters.”

On Love, King said:

When I speak of love I am not speaking
of some sentimental and weak response.

I am not speaking of that force which is just emotional bosh.

I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions
have seen as the
supreme unifying principle of life.

Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door
which leads to ultimate reality.

This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate --
ultimate reality is

beautifully summed up in the first epistle of Saint John:

"Let us love one another, for love is God.

And every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.

He that loveth not
knoweth not God,
for God is love."

"If we love one another,
God dwelleth in us
and his love is perfected in us."

The attacks were wrong. Period.

Let us Love the attackers.

Liz Cheney said,

“There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States
of his office
and his oath to the Constitution.”

The President actions inciting & repeatedly wrong.

Period.

Let us love him.

Undeniably, our systems continue to discriminate unjustly.
Period.

The imperative to address our nation's original sins
and abolish
the pervasive & systemic oppression
of those who fall outside of the white American hegemonic culture
continues to cry out for action,
calling louder to us today
than any other time in many of our lives.

We pray for all those in government & positions of power,
Especially those who actively resist necessary change.

Regarding Vietnam, Dr. King said, "When the issues at hand seem as
perplexing as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always
on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty; but we must move on."
Let us be Love in Action.

Perhaps especially amidst the uncertainty we as nation are experiencing now
it's never been more critical – to quote our beloved Dolly Cardwell – that we
get "busy taking the next step."
Being Love in Action.

"For men tied fast to the absolute, bled of their differences, drained of their
dreams by authoritarian leeches until nothing but pulp is left, become a
massive, sick Thing whose sheer weight is used ruthlessly by ambitious men.
Here is the real enemy of the people: our own selves dehumanized into the
masses. And where is the David who can slay this giant?"
One day, I realized that each of us has to find this David within him or herself.
It is a job, like breathing, that no one else can do for us.
And yet, I know too that as each discovers afresh the person within him—as
sculptors and painters, dancers and writers, the poets and the prophets and
the scientists put down in their unique ways what they find, the search grows

easier for every one . It is the individual 's task, yes; but it is also this generation 's historic mission to find and set up in a high place the human being revealed in his manifold differences and infinite possibilities, for all to see, to be exalted by, and to identify with.”

And so it is with us.

Lynchburgians.

Virginians.

Americans.

Humans.

Divine Beings.

We each are David.

And we depend inextricably on each other to be David too.

Love in Action.

Gordon Cosby in a long sermon on agape Love said this:

Love simply says

I want to be with you.

That's what Camp Kum Ba Yah always said to me, since I was four.

As I've looking back on the power of my experience with that beloved community for children, I've realized its love. A place to give space for children of all backgrounds to be together, to feel a sense of belonging, to share the joy of becoming together outside.

I want to be

WITH

You.

Being belonging becoming together.

Love in Action.

Building habitat for humanity homes

WITH god's people in need.

Not for them.

Love in Action.

Sharing food at the food pantry

WITH

those in need

Not giving it TO them.

Love in Action.

Like the three wise men who listened to “a dream”

And did not to go back to Herod,

Instead returning by another route.

Returning by another route.

Love in Action.

In my personal experiences with Camp Kum Ba Yah across my 43 years,

In being with the love of Church of the Covenant, Church of the Savior

And most importantly having been struck routinely again and again by the divine in BEING WITH others, I’m sure you also can say

Mine eyes [too] Have seen the Glory of the Coming of the Lord

For he has come by here.

He’s no stranger in our midst.

She speaks to us, through us, in us,
all the time.

He is Tracy down on Taylor Street.

She is Baby Girl, down on Harrison Street.

She WAS

the beautiful little 5 year old girl playing in the baby pool fountain in 1985,
hair carefully platted and adorned royally

with her colorful little beads
as the mid-morning sun glistened through the fountain water as it fell from
the sky and slipped through her tiny little camper hands.
He was the 11-year old Tinbridge Hill boy
who had never personally known a white person who he said “cared about
him” until he met Bev at Camp Kum-Ba-Yah in the 70’s.
He was Bev.
He was Martin.
She/he is you.
Each of you.

She has come by here so many times - and for that we’re so grateful.
For that Love manifest we have been so blessed.

Indeed the Beloved Community has manifest in many moments and places,
it ebbs and flows and shifts and travels
in its breadth and presence.

I wanted to close with simply two examples where, in my life,
I personally felt the Beloved Community manifest in our city of seven hills.

They both occurred at Lynchburg High. Lynchburg’s formerly all white high
school.

[Tour with bev]

[Bev’s celebration of life]

We have SO much work to do towards being the Beloved Community.
A yet we’ve seen it, glimpses and bursts.

It’s beloved. And it’s real.

In this season of Epiphanies,
Let us (re)commit to taking the next step & the next & the next.

Let us live in prayer,
working with our hearts not just our minds
Going in, not just out.

Let us Love in Action
Heeding the call to serve our brothers not our bank accounts,
Serving agape love, not feeding the sickness of American successfulism

Let us Manifest the Beloved Community –
And cultivate a world characterized by
being, belonging, and becoming
together.