

**“The Changing King”
The Unitarian Church of Lincoln
January 17, 2016**

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Gathering of the Community

Ring of Bell

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude:

Stating Intent

Chalice Lighting: by G. Woods

read by Amy Miller

Opening words: from Martin Luther King, Jr. in *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (1967)

read by the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods

Hymn: #149 “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

Time for all ages

Story

Children’s Song: #392 “Hineh Mah Tov”

Deepening

Reading: “A Network of Mutuality”

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Musical Interlude:

Sermon: “The Changing King”

Offering and Offertory:

Returning to Community: the work of the people

**Sharing of Joys and Sorrows
Meditation**

Integration and Release

Musical Meditation

Closing Hymn: #169 “We Shall Overcome”

Closing Words/Extinguish the Chalice:

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stating Intent

Chalice Lighting: by G. Woods

As we kindle the flame of our community,
let us call to remembrance those who inspire us,
those who offer their own flames
 through humanity’s darkest hours
lighting the way for others
 to see what yet may be done
 and better ways to do it
for peace, for justice, for love,
 for the greater good of all.

Opening words: from Martin Luther King, Jr. in *Where
Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (1967)

One day we must ask the question, “Why are there forty million poor people (now 46.5 million) in America. And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of

wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalist economy . . . You begin to ask the question, “Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that is two thirds water? – MLK, Jr.

Hymn: #149 “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

Time for all ages

Story

Children’s Song: #392 “Hineh Mah Tov”

Deepening

Reading: “A Network of Mutuality”

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,
tied in a single garment of destiny.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

There are some things in our social system
to which all of us ought to be maladjusted.

Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear,
only love can do that.

We must evolve for all human conflict a method
which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation.

The foundation of such a method is love.

Before it is too late, we must narrow the gaping chasm
between our proclamations of peace
and our lowly deeds which precipitate
and perpetuate war.

One day we must come to see
that peace is not merely a distant goal
that we seek but a means by which
we arrive at that goal.

We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.
We shall hew out of the mountain of despair,
a stone of hope.

Musical Interlude:

Sermon: “The Changing King”

We gather this Sunday, two days before the 87th birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., people called by the checkered history and heritage of racism in the United States of America and our own Unitarian Universalist values, to examine more deeply, as well as to honor, a man who did not want to be a leader of any civil rights movement, but was driven by the needs of his people and his own spiritual awareness to do so.

I am here to testify that my studies have convinced me that Martin Luther King, Jr. became more radicalized and universalist as he continued to work for the freedom, not only for his own African-American people, but of all people so oppressed: poor white folk, the grunts in the Armed Services of the US of A, and so forth. His became a quest of truly biblical proportions that embraced the Hebrew

prophets' focus upon the ignored needs of the poor, of widows and children, of immigrants, as Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman asserts. He would be consonant and resonant with the UU movement, "Standing on the Side of Love."

While most white folk choose to emphasize king's use of non-violent measures, from which King never swerved, I often wonder if that is how white folk manage to feel safe with King and far less so with Malcolm X. But Dr. King was changing, becoming more vociferous in his engagement with and opposition to oppression. So I would like to begin this discussion with a story that CNN commentator, John Blake told on May 19, 2010:

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was leaving a news conference one afternoon when a tall man with a coppery complexion stepped out of the crowd and blocked his path.

Malcolm X, the African-American Muslim leader who once called King "Rev. Dr. Chicken-wing," extended his hand and smiled.

"Well, Malcolm, good to see you," King said after taking Malcolm X's hand.

"Good to see you," Malcolm X replied as both men broke into huge grins while a gaggle of photographers snapped pictures of their only meeting.

That encounter on March 26, 1964, lasted only a minute. But a photo of that meeting has tantalized scholars and supporters of both men for more than 45 years.

Sadly, there is no other record of Dr. King and Dr. X meeting. Yes, both had Ph.Ds, and both men were moved by deeply spiritual motives.

Regarding Malcolm X, John Blake goes on to state:

. . . history has freeze-framed him as the angry black separatist who saw whites as blue-eyed devils.

Yet near the end of his life, Malcolm X was becoming more like King -- and King was becoming more like him. "In the last years of their lives, they were starting to move toward one another," says David Howard-Pitney, who recounted the Capitol Hill meeting in his book "Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s."

"While Malcolm is moderating from his earlier position, King is becoming more militant," Pitney says.

Malcolm X was reaching out to King even before he broke away from the Nation of Islam and embraced Sunni Islam after a pilgrimage to Mecca, says Andrew Young, a member of King's inner circle at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the [civil rights](#) group King headed.

To give more attention to Malcolm X's changes requires a whole additional service. Hence, for the purposes of today's study, let's retain our focus on Martin Luther King, Jr. Again, John Blake offers more information:

King's movement toward Malcolm began as he shifted the civil rights movement to the North, friends and scholars say.

During the last three years of his life, King became more radical. He talked about eliminating poverty and providing a guaranteed annual income for all U.S. citizens (Whoa! Now there's a socialist agenda!). He came out against the Vietnam War, and said American society would have to be restructured.

He also veered into Malcolm X's rhetorical territory when he started preaching black self-pride, says Pitney.

"King is photographed a number of times in 1967 and '68 wearing a 'Black is Beautiful' button," Pitney says.

A year before King died, the journalist David Halberstam even told him he "sounded like a nonviolent Malcolm X," Pitney says.

In the epic PBS civil rights series, Coretta Scott King, the civil rights leader's widow, said King never took Malcolm X's biting criticisms of his nonviolence stance personally. "I know Martin had the greatest respect for Malcolm ...," she said. "I think that if Malcolm had lived, at some point the two would have come closer together and would have been a very strong force."

(Andrew) Young, King's close aide, says King had become more militant near the end of his life.

"It was more radical to deal with poverty than to deal with segregation so, in that sense, it's true," Young says. "But

Dr. King never wavered in his commitment to nonviolence. In fact, he was getting stronger in his commitment to nonviolence. It was a more militant nonviolence."

I am convinced that it was Dr. King's expanded vision of justice that ultimately made it necessary for those who feared his power to shoot him down in Memphis, Tennessee on that horrible day of April 4, 1968. His concern for justice and peace evolved to include more than issues of racism. He manifests this in his essay published in 1967, "Why I am Opposed to the War in Vietnam:"

A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth with righteous indignation. It will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, "This is not just."

It is exactly those behaviors on the part of the capitalists of the United States of America that led to the "Occupy Wall Street" movement and the uprising of the 99% that ebbs

and flows around us in this decade. We have not heeded Dr. King's concerns.

I often wonder if we, the privileged, are so inured to the problems of the poor because we genuinely believe they do not concern us, despite history's constant reminder in all the revolutions we have seen and, sometimes, celebrate.

The impetus for Dr. King's engagement in his work for peace and justice came from a simple and powerful recognition that all things are connected, that we are truly caught in an inextricable network of mutuality. This mystical experience that cannot be refuted for anyone who has experienced it. This was true for both Dr. King and Dr. X, as David Howard-Pitney points out:

Despite their differences, both King and Malcolm X's political activism flowed from the same source, says Pitney, the civil rights scholar. "They were fundamentally spiritual men," Pitney says. "While we remember them for their social and political activism, they were religious and spiritual at their core."

Being mystical or spiritual does not call one to endless meditation and inaction; it calls a person to “do something,” something effective and decisive, about the inequities around us.

Our Unitarian Universalist values call us to affirm “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” and “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.” Many of us cavil at the former (Surely we are better than other people!) and find ourselves immobilized in relation to the latter (These problems are too big for any of us to affect!). Please do come today for the exploration of key issues that we face and yet may do something about. In addition, I will be exploring the UU affirmations in a sermon series next fall, so do stay tuned. We Can Do Better!

Once we have experienced the network of mutuality, aka “the interdependent web of all existence of which we

are a part,” we recognize that we are called to a life of service. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who did not bend his back to be ridden, but stood straight and strong to do the work to which he was called, stated this presciently in 1968 when he wrote:

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say...I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

“The Drum Major Instinct” (1968)

And that is why I am inspired by and love the *changing* Rev.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., taking him as a teacher and a

mentor who asks much of me, but offers a rich and full life, however long-lived, with respect, with responsibility, and with relish for the process. So Be It. Blessed Be!

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We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

Let the people say, Amen!