

*Bring Jesus*

A Sermon on Ephesians 6:10-20 and Luke 6:27-36 by the Rev. Philip Major  
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Twenty years ago, when I was in seminary, I had the opportunity to attend a retreat led by the Scottish theologian, Philip Newell. Philip has devoted much of his life to deepening the conversations between Christians and people of other faiths. At the retreat Philip told us about a conversation he had with the Dali Lama. He asked the Dali Lama, "When I come to a meeting of people of diverse faiths, what is most important for me to bring?" The Dali Lama responded, "Bring the best you have. Bring Jesus."

Bring Jesus into your conversation when you are talking with people of diverse faiths: Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, even Unitarians! What does it look like to bring Jesus into our conversations with those who are not Christian? What does it look like to bring Jesus into our daily life? What does it look like to bring Jesus when we are facing difficult challenges?

It looks like what Martin Luther King did in his life. Martin brought Jesus into his conversations with people of diverse faiths. Martin brought Jesus when he was facing the difficult challenges of life.

You and I feel we are facing unprecedented challenges in our lives. This feeling is true, because we are facing unprecedented challenges. Let's also remember that hundreds of people were killed in America during the Civil Rights movement. Let's remember that between 1954 and 1968, in many situations police and other law enforcement agents took it as their work to torture or kill black Americans and the white people who supported their right to equality. We are facing terrible challenges, in a way that is like the terrible challenges faced by our parents and grandparents sixty or seventy years ago.

Martin Luther King was one of the great leaders in our nation's history because he led us through one of our most difficult struggles to a time when there was much more freedom and harmony among the people of the United States. Martin led the people of the United States to address some of our most fundamental, destructive problems. Martin helped us establish more equality and stronger legal protections for all people. Martin accomplished this by bringing Jesus into the center of the conversation.

Martin brought Jesus into the conversation. Martin brought Jesus, which in turn brought much more hope and healing into our lives. I know this is what happened, because I was there, in the room with him, when I was a little boy. I was about three years old, holding onto my father's hand. Dr. King was holding my little brother in his arms. According to my father, I looked around at the people in the house where we were gathered and looked at Dr. King, and asked, "Is he Jesus?"

One of the pastors in my dad's clergy group had been killed in a civil rights demonstration, so Martin came to be with us for a while. Martin brought Jesus with him into the conversation. Martin brought Jesus with him, which, in turn brought more trust and reassurance for the people in the room. The overall effect was as if Martin said, "Remember, you are God's beloved children."

There was one specific element of Jesus' ministry and teachings that Martin brought to us, that I want to talk about with you today. Jesus taught and showed us that religious faith is not separate from everyday life. According to Jesus, we show our love of God by our love for the people around us. Jesus told us we show our faithfulness to God, by how faithfully we care for the people who need it most.

Martin brought this idea from Jesus to all of his work. Religious faith is not separate from daily life. Our faith is relevant for every day of our lives, and for every part of our lives.

Jesus brought the people hope and told them they were blessed by God. Jesus also fed the people and healed the people. Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, two by two, and gave them instructions to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. Jesus' disciples preached the good news of God's love for all people, and then they showed the good news of God's love by taking care of the people. According to Jesus, our practical needs are deeply connected to our spiritual needs.

Take Jesus' teaching about forgiveness as an example. Jesus taught his disciples to practice forgiveness as a way of life. I encourage you to do the same. If you practice forgiveness, the world will be a better place. If you practice forgiveness, you will be spiritually stronger. You will also feel better. You will be physically stronger and more resilient if you practice forgiveness. If you are not able to forgive, if you cannot let go of your anger and your bitterness, it will cripple you spiritually. Eventually the anger and bitterness inside you will weaken you physically. Our physical health is deeply connected with our spiritual health.

Martin understood this. Martin had tremendous love inside him. He also had a brilliant mind. Even as a young man, Martin could see that the problems at the center of America were spiritual problems, as much as practical problems. Martin helped us understand that the division, anger, bitterness, violence, fear, ignorance, and resentment that run through the history of the United States are spiritual as well as practical problems. Martin kept trying to explain to us that we cannot solve these fundamental problems by responding with more division, hatred, anger, bitterness, and violence, or by responding with more fear, ignorance, and resentment. Martin understood that his people would be defeated and destroyed, not by guns and clubs wielded by white men. Martin understood that his people would be defeated and destroyed by cultivating anger, hatred, bitterness and violence in their hearts and minds.

We see what anger, hatred, bitterness, and violence have brought to our nation in 2026. Some people have made the decision to cultivate fear, resentment, ignorance, and divisions in our nation, and now we are seeing the results. The result of cultivating divisions, anger, resentment and ignorance is more fear, more bitterness, more hatred, and more violence inflicted on the people of our nation.

A remarkable thing happened a few months ago. One of our public officials admitted that she had made a mistake, and she said so out loud. For all of us, the first step toward healing and strength is to admit when we have made mistakes. Marjorie Taylor Green took the first steps toward healing and strength for herself a few months ago. She realized she had been acting out of hatred and bitterness, and that it was leading her, and us, to all of the wrong places. She admitted, "I realized that I'm part of this toxic culture. I really started looking at my faith. I wanted to be more like Christ."

So you see, Marjorie and I are alike in a very important way. Both of us want to be more like Christ. This thing Marjorie and I have in common is much more important than our differences. This is what Martin taught us, and it's what Jesus taught us. Our shared humanity is the most powerful truth in the world.

According to Martin, and according to Jesus, the things we have in common with those we think of as our enemies are much greater and more powerful than the things that divide us. It is a physical, practical truth as well as a spiritual truth. This is the idea behind our Gospel passage for today. *Jesus said, "I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."*

Martin preached on this passage many times. In 1957, Martin was preaching on these words of Jesus and said, "Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that. Hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe...The strong person is the person who can cut off the

chain of hate, the chain of evil...and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love."

Martin tried to explain to us that love is the greatest power in the universe. Martin understood that Jesus words were essential in the spiritual sense, and absolutely essential in the practical sense. Martin understood that our ability to act with strength, for the healing of the world is inextricably connected with our spiritual strength and health.

You and I are facing some of the greatest challenges of our lives. These challenges will require us to respond with love, because if we respond with curses and bitterness and hatred our situation will only get worse. So I ask you, in this extremely challenging time, what will you do to bring the Good News of God's love into the center of your life this week? What will you do to be strong enough to be a person who loves others?

You are a beloved child of God. The person who is behaving as if they are your enemy is also a beloved child of God. What are you and I going to do each day in the coming year to follow the instructions and examples given to us by Jesus, and reinterpreted and explained for our times by Martin Luther King? What are you and I going to do to help us remember and act on the most truth that those who threaten us are also beloved children of God?

The author of Ephesians encourages us. *Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of God's power.* What will this look like for you to be strong in the power of God's love?

Martin would remind us that *our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but* it is first and foremost against the fear, anger and bitterness that can grow inside us. How will you put on the armor of God? To borrow a phrase from my sister in Christ, Marjorie, how will you strengthen yourself so you do not succumb and become part of the toxic culture of hatred and violence?

What will you do to follow Martin's example, and bring Jesus into daily life? What are the songs you will sing? What are the prayers you will say? Where is that place of quietness that will give you strength and wisdom that you need in order to do the most important thing, which is to love?

Now that we find ourselves in the middle of the struggle, we must encourage one another to find our strength in the greatest power given to us by God, the power to love, the power to build trust and connections. Now, more than ever, we must follow Martin's example, and set aside the practices of division and the bitter fruits of ridicule, ignorance, and anger. Now, more than ever, we must follow Martin's example and bring Jesus with us each and every day, to every person, each one a beloved child of God.