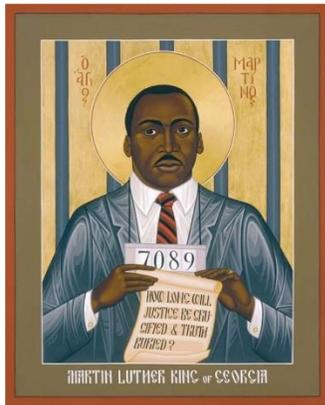


Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Jan 19, 2020
Martin Luther King Jr Sunday

Christian Hospitality (Ps 40:1-11 and Acts 21:1-16)



After these days we got ready
and started to go up to Jerusalem.
Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came along
and brought us to the house of Cyprus,
an early disciple,
with who we were to stay.
(Acts 20:15-16)

[Our image this morning is done by Brother Robert Lenz, a Franciscan friar stationed in Silver Springs, Maryland, and is one of many he has painted to honour people who “manifested Christ's commandment to love to a heroic degree.”]

Insights from the story within the story

The hospitality of Jesus and his early followers landed them in jail and got them executed or assassinated – that's the challenge that Christian hospitality poses in many cultures – if you are going to be open and welcoming with those God has enabled you to love, then you will be trespassing across boundaries that many groups of humans cower behind in search of safety and security – in the grip of that kind of fear, an angry defensiveness, expressed in a stance of protection at all costs, and justified by gross misrepresentations of Christianity and other spiritual traditions, becomes acceptable – in the media, it's often called 'the new populism' – and it takes root among groups who feel threatened by changes they scapegoat onto people who are different from them – their anger is particularly virulent at those in their own ethnic, economic, geographical, or religious tribes who dare to question their purity, privilege, and power – Jesus and the early church crossed those boundaries over and over again and paid those prices – so did the movement symbolized so powerfully by Martin Luther King Jr – that's why the civil rights movement and this representative voice within it deserve respectful remembrance today

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- Sometimes I get fascinated by the smallest of words in a passage we're considering – this week the word was 'we' – this is Luke as part of the early Christian movement that is crossing all sorts of long-established communal boundaries to be ambassadors of God's forgiving and reconciling love as God's redeems the world into a new creation in Christ – where "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) – we are freed in Christ to be the friends God desires us so deeply to be – ambassadors of God's self-giving love in the service of God's beloved creation – that's what the 'we' in this passage is up to – and many around them don't like it – but they stayed strong in their voicing of this vision – in the dream they had that Paul, and Luke, and Peter, and others voiced in their day – and we are a continuing part of that 'we' in our day
- We talked many times about how the Books of the Acts of the Apostles is really a biography of what the Holy Spirit, the active energetic presence of God, was doing in and through this movement – this morning's passage focused our attention on where the movement, the 'we' Luke refers to, was being led – to the centres of power in that age – to Jerusalem where the power of a purist and protective religion was centred – to the growing cities of the world where the power of a controlling and callous empire was centred, especially in Rome – this is not a movement that comforts people by allowing them to huddle together in a haven in a heartless world – it provokes them to be with and to witness to the troubled, traumatized peoples who long for the freedom to live into their authentic identities as beloved friends of their Creator – that is their dream and we are still invited by the Spirit to become part of it, to become a 'we' with it

How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?

At Brentwood, we pray and practice so that 'we' can become ever more faithfully a centre of Christian hospitality, welcoming and working with people from across all the boundaries we can imagine and a few more that the Spirit will introduce as a surprise – we are honoured and humbled when people find this space welcoming, the people who participate here welcoming, and the message of forgiving and reconciling love that we voice welcoming – I trust that, whether you've been here for decades or just found us this morning, you will have experienced some of that Christian hospitality this morning and that you might just be fascinated enough by the 'we' of this morning to explore it with us further – and don't forget lunch after church

My Notes

My Prayers

