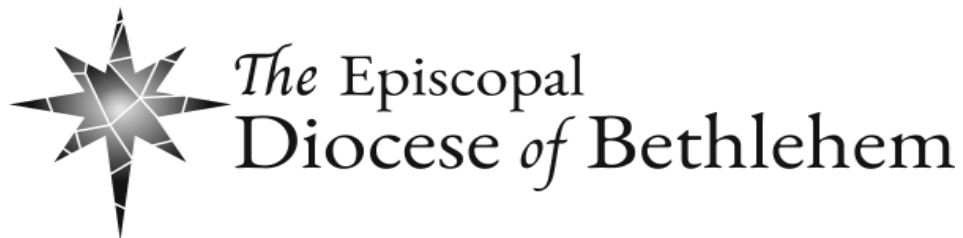


Liturgical and Formation Resources For

The Feast of Martin Luther King, Jr.

January 15, 2024



Racial Justice and Reconciliation Task Force

Martin Luther King, Jr. *Civil Rights Leader and Martyr, 1968*

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta. As the son and grandson of Baptist preachers, he was steeped in the Black Church tradition. Following graduation from Morehouse College (Atlanta, Georgia) in 1948, King entered Crozer Theological Seminary (Chester, Pennsylvania), having been ordained the previous year into the ministry of the National Baptist Church. He graduated from Crozer in 1951 and received his doctorate in theology from Boston University in 1955.

In 1954, King became pastor of a church in Montgomery, Alabama. There, Black indignation at inhumane treatment on segregated buses culminated in December, 1955, in the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat to a white man. King was catapulted into national prominence as the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott. He became increasingly the articulate prophet, who could not only rally the Black masses, but could also move the consciences of Whites.

King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to spearhead non-violent mass demonstrations against racism. Many confrontations followed, most notably in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, and in Chicago. King's campaigns were instrumental to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968. King then turned his attention to economic empowerment of the poor and opposition to the Vietnam War, contending that racism, poverty, and militarism were interrelated. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his commitment to non-violent social change.

King lived in constant danger: his home was dynamited, he was almost fatally stabbed, and he was harassed by death threats. He was even jailed 30 times; but through it all he was sustained by his deep faith. In 1957, he received, late at night, a vicious telephone threat. Alone in his kitchen he wept and prayed. He relates that he heard the Lord speaking to him and saying, "Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness, stand up for justice," and promising never to leave him alone—"No, never alone." King refers to his vision as his "Mountain-top Experience."

After preaching at Washington Cathedral on March 31, 1968, King went to Memphis in support of sanitation workers in their struggle for better wages. There, he proclaimed that he had been "to the mountain-top" and had seen "the Promised Land," and that he knew that one day he and his people would be "free at last." On the following day, April 4, he was cut down by an assassin's bullet.

Suggested Collects

A Great Cloud of Witnesses

Rite I Almighty God, who by the hand of Moses thy servant didst lead thy people out of slavery, and didst make them free at last: Grant that thy Church, following the example of thy prophet Martin Luther King, may resist oppression in the name of thy love, and may strive to secure for all thy children the blessed liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Rite II Almighty God, by the hand of Moses your servant you led your people out of slavery, and made them free at last: Grant that your Church, following the example of your prophet Martin Luther King, may resist oppression in the name of your love, and may strive to secure for all your children the blessed liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

For Social Justice (pg. 260)

Almighty God, who hast created us in thine own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

For Social Justice (pg. 823)

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart [and especially the hearts of the people of this land], that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For the Oppressed (pg. 826)

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Thanksgiving For the Diversity of Races and Cultures (pg. 840)

O God, who created all peoples in your image, we thank you for the wonderful diversity of races and cultures in this world. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship, and show us your presence in those who differ most from us, until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Learn

King's "[Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#)" (April 16, 1963)

Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" is one of his most powerful and inspiring writings. It is published at the African Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania. For contextual background to this letter, see the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute's encyclopedia here.](#)

Suggested Short Passages of Scripture for Study and Formation Gatherings

But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'

1 Samuel 16.7

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners

Isaiah 61.1

[The Lord] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6.8

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Amos 5.24

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Luke 4.18-19

‘I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

John 13.34–35

Then Peter began to speak to them: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’

Acts 10.34–35

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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.

Galatians 3.26–29

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2.3–4

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

Hebrews 13.1–3

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2.8–9

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

Revelation 7.9

Sources:

A Great Cloud of Witnesses: A Calendar of Commemorations. Church Publishing, 2016.

The Book of Common Prayer. 1979.

BuildFaith. "Resources to Learn, Pray, and Act This Martin Luther King Day." Building Faith, 12 Jan. 2023, buildfaith.org/martin-luther-king-day/.

Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]

www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.