



GROW. PRAY. STUDY.

The Church of the Resurrection – Weekly Guide

“What Dr. King Would Say” with Dr. Clarence Jones

SUNDAY 4.8.18

He 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*

On April 7-8, Dr. Clarence Jones spoke at our church 50 years after Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination. We built this week’s GPS around Bible examples King cited in his April 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” White Christian and Jewish clergymen had published a critique of non-violent civil rights protests as too impatient and extreme.

[Click here \(https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html\)](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html) to read the full text of King’s powerful response.

“Outside agitator” or missionary?

MONDAY 4.9.18 Acts 16:6-10

“I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against “outsiders coming in”.... I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.... As the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their ‘thus saith the Lord’ far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and...the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.”

- ✚ In some way (Luke didn’t say how), the Holy Spirit limited Paul’s work in Asia Minor. In the port city of Troas, Paul had a vivid vision of a man from Macedonia asking him to come there. Paul and his companions promptly left for Macedonia, expanding the gospel’s reach into a part of Europe. Dr. King moved from a fairly safe pastorate to leading (in ways he at first thought temporary) the civil rights movement. In what ways has God altered plans you might have had for your life?
- ✚ In 21st century America, you are unlikely to face imprisonment or death (as both Paul and Dr. King did) for following God’s vision. But that doesn’t mean obeying God’s calling(s) has become easy and comfortable. In what ways has following God’s vision for your life been challenging? Are you willing to obey God’s call on your life, no matter what?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were the ultimate “outsider coming in.” How grateful I am that you didn’t just leave us in darkness and lostness. Give me the courage I need to follow your calling in my life. Amen.

“A process of self purification”

TUESDAY 4.10.18 Romans 12:17-21

“We would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: ‘Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?’ ‘Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?’”

- ✚ Traveling in Nero’s corrupt, cruel Roman Empire, the apostle Paul must have at times felt the urge to lash out in anger against evil. So much was unjust, corrupt and immoral! Yet Paul, and Christians who lived out his counsel, formed a movement living by utterly opposite values that has long outlasted Nero and his Empire. Paul said in today’s reading they devoted themselves to “defeat evil with good.” Did that “work” for Paul and the early Christians? Did it “work” for Dr. King and the civil rights movement?
- ✚ Paul drew on ancient Hebrew wisdom, quoting [Proverbs 25:21-22](#). When, in your own dealings or world affairs, have you seen enemies brought together because one side was willing to act toward the other with kindness rather than hatred or contempt? What has to happen in human hearts to bring about mutual reconciliation, to make people receptive to even overtures that are kind and generous?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it can be hard to purify myself from angry, vengeful feelings and actions. Keep growing the fruit of the Spirit in me, showing me better ways to respond. Amen.

Biblical models of “civil disobedience”

WEDNESDAY 4.11.18 Daniel 3:4-18, Acts 4:18-20, 5:27-32

“You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws.... Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in public schools...it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’.... there are two types of laws: just and unjust.... there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.”

- ✚ At the end of the gospel of Luke (Acts was “volume 2” of the same story), Jesus told his disciples: “A change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in [my] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:47-48). When the council and the high priest ordered them NOT to preach, they had no doubt who they must obey. Have you ever had to decide whether to obey God or some human authority? If so, what did you decide to do?
- ✚ Acts 5:42 said the apostles “left the council rejoicing because they had been regarded as worthy to suffer disgrace for the sake of the name.” Before Jesus’ death, the apostles had squabbled about which of them should be greatest. Now they were happy to face disgrace for obeying God. How had they come to see God’s priorities more clearly? How can you clarify God’s view of issues in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I like it when people praise my church, or some act of service I do. Make me willing to also face ridicule or scorn, if that’s what it takes for me to live loyally to you. Amen.

Amos an extremist for justice

THURSDAY 4.12.18 Amos 5:18-24

“You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist.... But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.... Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream."

- ✚ It's only human to assume, in any story we're involved in, that we are the "good guys." That's what the eight clergymen to whom Dr. King responded had assumed, even as they at least implicitly supported continuing racial segregation. What moral hazards arise when we make that assumption? How can we be wiser than the (outwardly) very religious Israelites to whom Amos' spoke?
- ✚ What opportunities do you have in your regular round of daily activities to act in ways that result in justice and righteousness? What risks or costs do those choices involve? How willing are you to consistently "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream"?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, what a vision—an ever-flowing stream of righteousness rolling down in a waterfall of justice! Embed that vision in my heart, and make me a channel through whom that stream can flow. Amen.

Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel

FRIDAY 4.13.18 Galatians 6:14-17

“You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist.... But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.... Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

- ✚ Roman philosopher Cicero wrote, "The idea of the cross should never come near the bodies of Roman citizens; it should never pass through their thoughts, eyes or ears." No Roman "boasted" in any way about a cross. Yet Paul (a Roman citizen—cf. [Acts 22:25-27](#)) wrote, "God forbid that I should boast about anything except for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus' cross (and resurrection—hence Paul's mention of "new creation") had changed his life. Do you trust in—even "boast in"—Jesus, the crucified king?
- ✚ Scholar N. T. Wright wrote of this passage, "Calvary was the turning-point of history.... This new creation began with Jesus himself at his resurrection, continues with the spirit-given new life which wells up in all who belong to the Messiah, and will go on until, as Paul says in Romans 8, the whole creation will be set free from its own slavery and will share the freedom of the glory of God's children."

* In what ways has Jesus' power given you new life? How do you use your gifts, time and talents to expand God's restoring, reviving work?

Prayer: Loving Lord, even after you rose from the dead, you kept the marks of the cross on your risen, transformed body. Help me, like Paul, to bear those marks in my heart (and on my body if necessary), to show your victory over evil and hate. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 82.

Jesus an extremist for love

SATURDAY 4.14.18 Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-28

“You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist.... But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.... Was not Jesus an extremist for love: ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’.... Was not Martin Luther an extremist: ‘Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.’ And John Bunyan: ‘I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.’ And Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’ And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . .’ So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love?”

✚ Jesus’ words about loving enemies and praying for those who mistreat us are as daring today as when he spoke them. He expanded the point in Matthew 5:45: “[God] makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good.” Could Dr. King have accurately said that God is an extremist for love? “When God makes straight our path, and we walk in peace, man can only do so because it is the Lord God who enables us to do so.” * How has God empowered you to live more lovingly? In what relationships do you find it hardest to live in loving ways toward others? Do you believe Jesus can guide you to live out his kind of love to bless others without being a “doormat,” lacking healthy boundaries and selfcare?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to love all my neighbors, even the ones who think they’re my enemies. That’s much easier to say than to do. Please shape me into an extremist for love. Amen.

* Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* (p. 18)

Family Activity: Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” Gather your family for a late-night drive out to the country. Find a place where the sky is dark and the stars shine through the darkness. Depending on the weather, place blankets on the ground, lie down and look up at the sky. Take the first moments to simply be still and give thanks for God’s beautiful creation. Invite everyone to try and count the stars. Discuss the difference the stars make in the night sky. Imagine together what the sky would look like without any stars. Read the above quote from Dr. King and Matthew 5:14-16. Share ideas about ways each of you can be lights in the darkness for God. Ask God to help you.