

**THANKING GOD for PROPHETS in OUR TIME  
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.  
January 15, 1829 – April 4, 1968**



**HE WHO IS GREATEST AMONG YOU  
WILL BE YOUR SERVANT.  
HAVE A HEART FULL OF GRACE  
AND A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE  
AND YOU CAN BE THAT SERVANT.**

**Education:**

1948: BA in Sociology Moorhouse College

1951: BA in Theology Crozer Theological Seminary

1955: PhD in Systematic Theology Boston University

Martin Luther King entered the Christian ministry and was ordained in February 1948 at the age of nineteen at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. Following his ordination, he became Assistant Pastor of Ebenezer. Upon completion of his studies at Boston University, he accepted the call of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. He was the pastor of Dexter Avenue from September 1954 to November 1959, when he resigned to move to Atlanta to direct the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. From 1960 until his death in 1968, he was co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church and President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Dr. King was a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement. He was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization that was responsible for the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott from 1955 to 1956 (381 days). He was arrested thirty times for his participation in civil rights activities. He was a founder and president of Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1957 to 1968. He was also vice president of the national Sunday School and Baptist Teaching Union Congress of the National Baptist Convention. He was a member of several national and local boards of directors and served on the boards of trustees of several institutions and agencies. Dr. King was elected to membership in several learned societies including the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a vital personality of the modern era. His lectures and remarks stirred the concern and sparked the conscience of a generation; the movements and marches he led brought significant changes in the fabric of American life; his courageous and selfless devotion gave direction to thirteen years of civil rights activities; his charismatic leadership inspired men and women, young and old, in the nation and abroad.

Dr. King's concept of somebodiness gave black and poor people a new sense of worth and dignity. His philosophy of nonviolent direct action, and his strategies for rational and non-destructive social change, galvanized the conscience of this nation and reordered its priorities. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, for example, went to Congress as a result of the Selma to Montgomery march. His wisdom, his words, his actions, his commitment, and his dreams for a new cast of life, are intertwined with the American experience.

Dr. King's speech at the march on Washington in 1963, his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize, his last sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and his final speech in Memphis are among his most famous utterances (I've Been to the Mountaintop). The Letter from Birmingham Jail ranks among the most important American documents.

Dr. King was shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968, by James Earl Ray. James Earl Ray was arrested in London, England on June 8, 1968 and returned to Memphis, Tennessee to stand trial for the assassination of Dr. King. On March 9, 1969, before coming to trial, he entered a guilty plea and was sentenced to ninety-nine years in the Tennessee State Penitentiary. Dr. King had been in Memphis to help lead sanitation workers in a protest against low wages and intolerable conditions. His funeral services were held April 9, 1968, in Atlanta at Ebenezer Church and on the campus of Morehouse College, with the President of the United States proclaiming a day of mourning and flags being flown at half-staff. The area where Dr. King was entombed is located on Freedom Plaza and surrounded by the Freedom Hall Complex of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site, a 23 acre area was listed as a National Historic Landmark on May 5, 1977, and was made a National Historic Site on October 10, 1980 by the U.S. Department of the Interior.



**Let us remember that we are always and everywhere in the holy presence of our God.**

**We are God's chosen people made in His image and likeness and endowed with inalienable rights of being created equal with freedom and justice for all.**

**Holy is God, holy and mighty, holy and living forever!**

**From time to time, God raises up men and women to act as prophets among us and lead us back to God and to lead lives of holiness and righteousness. Martin Luther King, Jr. was just one of those people who was called by God to remind the people that we were not following the commands of Jesus to love our brothers and sisters and to be companions on the journey to the kingdom. People who had long been oppressed and thought of as "no people" were asked to take their rightful place in society and society was asked to help raise them up and accept them as our true brothers and sisters.**

## **GOD WITH JOY WE LOOK AROUND US**

God with joy we look around us  
At your world's diversity.  
Folk of every kind surround us  
And you call your church to see;  
All are made in your own image!  
All are people whom you love.

In the times we've hurt each other,  
Lord, we've hurt the ones you bless.  
Hating sister, cursing brother,  
We've denied what you express;  
All are made in your own image!  
All are people whom you love!

God, you sent a Savior to us,  
Breaking walls that would divide.  
By your Spirit, now work through us  
As we witness side by side;  
All are made in your own image!  
All are people whom you love!

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## **SCRIPTURE**

**GENESIS 37:18–20** They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. They said to each other, "Here comes that dreamer. Now is our chance; let us kill him and throw him into one of these pits and say that a wild beast has devoured him. Then we shall see what will become of his dreams".

**PSALMS 82:3–4** Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

**Proverbs 21:3** Do what is right and just; that is more pleasing to God than sacrifice.

**ISAIAH 1:16–17** Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

**ISAIAH 51:7** Hearken unto me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of people, and be not dismayed by their revilings.

**MATTHEW 5:3–12** Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

**COLOSSIANS 3:12–14** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving one another; as God has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

**2 PETER 3:13** What we await are new heavens and a new earth where, according to God's promise, the justice of God will reside.

#### **A LITANY OF CELEBRATION**

**LEADER:** Martin King had a dream. The ideals of justice and freedom and the belief that all are created equal in the eyes of God are noble principles. But they are meaningless unless they become the personal possession of each one of us.

**ALL:** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent. I will struggle with myself. I will not rest until the dream of justice and freedom becomes my personal dream. I must realize that I am not an innocent bystander. I can help realize the dream by my action, or delay it by inaction.

**LEADER:** Martin's dream of a day when people from all races and nations, even the offspring of slaves and former slave owners, can sit at a table as brothers and sisters and find ways of transforming their differences into assets. That was Martin's dream. What is your dream?

**ALL:** My dream is that one day soon I will find a way to stop just celebrating the dream and start living it. It must become a part of my daily life; or nothing much will change.

**LEADER:** The dream is not about an ideal world; it is about the real world. Martin King's poetic refrain, "I Have a Dream," is a call for us to remember the real world where injustice abounds.

**ALL:** When I am in the shelter of my home I must remember the homeless. When I eat, I must remember the hungry. When I feel secure I must remember the insecure. When I see injustice I must remember that it will not stop unless I stop it.

**LEADER:** I have a dream!

**ALL: I also have a dream. I have a dream that the Holy Spirit will arouse in me that very flame of righteousness that caused Martin King to become a living sacrifice for the freedom and liberation of all of God's Children. Then I will be able to resist racial injustice everywhere I see it, even within myself.**

**-- The United Presbyterian Church**

#### **AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH BASED ON THE WRITINGS OF DR. KING**

**I refuse to believe that we are unable to influence the events which surround us.**

**I refuse to believe that we are so bound to racism and war, that peace, brotherhood and sisterhood are not possible.**

**I believe there is an urgent need for people to overcome oppression and violence, without resorting to violence and oppression.**

**I believe that we need to discover a way to live together in peace, a way that rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of this way is love.**

**I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. I believe that right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.**

**I believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.**

**I believe that what self-centered people have torn down, other-centered people can build up.**

**By the goodness of God at work within people, I believe that brokenness can be healed. "And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and everyone will sit under their own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid."**

**The United Presbyterian Church**

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#### **PRAYER**

**(L) For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Let freedom ring!**

**(R) Our history and our destiny lie in our willingness to speak until the strongholds of prejudice and bigotry crumble before the new creations of justice and equality for all God's children.**

**(L) We will not be silent. Let freedom ring!  
For the freedom of every human being, let freedom ring!**

**For the salvation of the world, let freedom ring!  
For the glory of God, let freedom ring!**

**(All) We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome today.  
Oh deep in my heart, I do believe that we shall overcome today.  
We shall not be silent, we shall not be silent, we shall not be silent today.  
Oh deep in my heart, I do believe we shall not be silent today.  
We are not afraid, we are not afraid, we are not afraid today.  
Oh deep in my heart, I do believe, we are not afraid today.**

**BENEDICTION**

**Jesus said that you ought always to pray and not be faint.  
Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men and women.  
Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers but for power equal to your tasks.  
Then, the doing of your work will be no miracle - you will be the miracle.  
Each day you will wonder at yourself and the richness of life which has  
come to you by the grace of God.  
May the God our Creator, Jesus our Redeemer, and the Spirit Sanctifier bless  
and keep us as we represent You in our world. Amen.**



**Saint John Baptist de La Salle  
and all you holy Brothers who have gone before us,  
inspire us to work for justice and peace through education for all peoples.**

**Live Jesus in our hearts. Forever!**

**We will speed the day when all of God's children,  
black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles,  
Protestants and Catholics,  
will be able to join hands and sing...  
Free at last, free at last,  
thank God Almighty, I'm free at last.  
MLK**