

from Doctor Martin Luther King.

Every volunteer was required to sign a Commitment Card that read:

1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. Remember always that the non-violent movement seeks justice and reconciliation — not victory.
3. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. Pray daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.
5. Sacrifice personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. Observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. Seek to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. Refrain from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. Strive to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. Follow the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.¹

Sermon: Invitation and Immediacy

January 21, 2024

by Angela Rausch

Many years ago when I was a graduate student at Santa Clara University we studied a bit about Doctor Martin Luther King. Last Monday was Martin Luther King day, and I wanted to talk about his invitations and immediacy, and Jesus' invitation and immediacy in his calling of disciples. I then wanted to share how I saw the invitation and immediacy play out with a personal invitation for my dad.

Dr King's commitment card is utterly amazing. Let's read the 10 points and I invite you to reflect on how these are and might be relevant in your life, work, family, school.

READ Commitment Card (above)

All through my childhood my entire family, my dad included, all attended Catholic church every Sunday but my dad was not Catholic he was Baptist. I remember one Sunday after this Gospel when I was in high School my dad came home and said he was invited to be "fishers of men and he was joining the Catholic Church." I wasn't surprised but more like, why now? And I think that the reason was because he was personally invited. Neither my mom nor us kids ever asked my dad to join the Catholic church; we assumed he wasn't interested.

¹King, Martin Luther, and Reverend Jesse L. Jackson. *Why We Can't Wait*. New York: New American Library, 2006. 67-68. Print.

As I look over Dr. King's 10 commitments, I feel amazed that this was his prerequisite. It is gentle, prayerful, compassionate and overwhelming. I feel I'm being bullied into inaction, it is too challenging. I cannot do all of them everyday, heck I'm not sure I can even understand them in my world.

One of the ways to tackle a large project or goal is to make smaller goals, or break it down. So I sat with these and slowly read them over. The one that is drawing me in is the second commitment. This is the one that speaks to me.

2. Remember always that the non-violent movement seeks justice and reconciliation — not victory.

Non-violence. I don't believe Jesus was violent, and I sense most in this room don't believe that either. I'm not a violent person, ask my brothers or husband. I never fight back or throw punches, I usually just retreat. I build my wall of silence, nothing helpful or nice to say so I retreat.

I'm starting to notice that my complacency is a form of violence. Jesus was not complacent. Walls of silence shut people out. It says you are not worth my time. Yes, this may be an extreme example. And yes, there are times when holding my tongue is really the non-violent way, but other times it is not. Please remember I'm sharing my discernment with this goal and my invitation to non-violence. Part of that commitment says to not seek victory. For me that means being right. I've started to admit when I'm wrong. It was wrong to tell my adult daughter to stay in a job that was clearly not for her. She is an adult, did I mention that, and it's her job and well-being, not mine. I was wrong and I have lots of work to do.

Invitations are tricky things. Sometimes they call us to attend to things we would rather not attend to, like my number two commitment to non-violence. At other times they are a welcome mat into a new path. We/I never asked my dad to join the Catholic church; we assumed there wasn't a need, desire or purpose. A mantra in my family is if you don't ask, the answer is no. Invitations are a challenge, they require courage.

Let's transition to invitation and immediacy. In Mark's Gospel today we hear Jesus say to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people," and immediately they followed, that is what Mark and Matthew said. Luke is slightly different, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." Luke's invitation is slightly nuanced.

John of course is a bit different because he is John. It seems Jesus appeared to John and two disciples. John looked at Jesus' walk and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard this and followed. Jesus then does this invitational dialogue, what do you seek, come and see. Thus the friends join and invite and the group grows.

I tend to favor John's account because there is more dialogue and possibly more relationship building. I think there was a personal invitation with lots of dialogue. Maybe that's my bias, I'm a relationship person and hearing your story delights me. Let's also remember Mark's gospel is the shortest and first one written. Mark seems to be fast paced and deliberate.

A way to explore the scripture more fully is a practice called Lectio Divina. In Latin, Lectio Divina means divine reading. In this, one takes a scripture or any text and reads it several times slowly.

Usually on the first reading one listens for a word that resonates with them, one is listening for a word that gives comfort, discomfort, whatever there; is no judgment, this is Spirit work. After a pause the reading is read again, slowly. This time one is looking for a feeling or emotion or a tug of the heart. Finally, the reading is read a third time, one is listening for an action, a calling. This is really a slow process and sometimes things are not revealed immediately.

We at St Thomas do this practice on Tuesdays after our Centering Prayer sitting. (See the bulletin or website for the link.) I also do this practice with one of my “wisdom women’s groups,” especially when I know I’m going to preach here. In my Lectio Divina with my Wisdom ladies, using Mark’s gospel reading today, the word that presented itself to me and my wisdom women was *immediately*. If you know me at all, I’m slow. Slow to action, slow driving, slow biking, slow running, slow. And my mantra is slow and steady wins the race. So I took great discomfort in the word *immediately*.

We heard in the gospel text *immediately*. Mark uses “immediately,” 4 times in the first chapter. I imagine Jesus was known to his disciples way before the asking. I wonder if the seeds were planted years ago and the subtle invitation was growing and then with the ask it was like, immediately. I imagine it was similar to my dad. He was getting to know Jesus over the years and the desire in him was growing over years, decades.

I called my dad about this sermon and my memories of him being invited into full participation in the church. A few things were affirmed, we my brothers and I and mom never asked my dad to join the church. But he attended mass with us every Sunday. He was invited by another parishioner who noticed he never went to communion. Personal invitation is the key ingredient. And with immediacy he joined the church, but my sense is that immediacy was growing over a long time. I sensed that the desire was burning a fire in him.

How does this gospel of invitation and immediacy relate to Martin Luther King and his commitments? I’m going to assume that many of us feel that Dr King had a fire in his belly and maybe this grew over time. It’s also possible that people following him also had this fire in their belly, they also lived the injustice. They accepted the invitation of Dr King and the immediacy in their day-to-day lives. Practicing those 10 commitments daily would likely help discern the call and continued call, especially if we believe God works through us.

We know that feelings and energy in our bodies are valuable. Imagine a time when you felt that passion in your belly from the energy of another person or event. Maybe it was watching a professional musician or athlete and how their talent moved you. Or maybe you recall an injustice, like a child being harshly disciplined, a free medical clinic being shut down, an unhoused person’s foot wounds, the sudden death of a neighbor - be with that feeling and notice how the energy is palpable. Feel that feeling in your body, your soul; don’t think about it because it doesn’t make sense in the headspace. It’s a feeling of energy that’s indescribable. It’s passion.

It’s the Spirit moving through us. Witnessing that justice or injustice moves us deep within. This is how invitation starts and immediacy begins.

Be well.

~ Angela Rausch January 21, 2024