

He wasn't just a Dreamer,
He was a Doer!

As we mark that tragic day, April 4, 1968, when the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was taken from us so suddenly and painfully, my own heart is filled with many thoughts and feelings. His life and message is something we celebrate. His leadership and teaching is the legacy we carry forward today. And his blood-soaked passing continues to be a wound in all our hearts, even now.

1968 was a hard year for our country. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed into law, the divisions and inequities of racism were still rampant in our society. Division about the war in Vietnam tore the country into camps both for and against the war. Dr. King's assassination shocked us and threw us into grief. And later that year, another of the Kennedy brothers, Bobby, would be assassinated, as well. A sitting, and otherwise popular president because of his commitment to Civil Rights and the War on Poverty, Lyndon Johnson, would choose not to run again in the face of such deep pain and ugly division in the nation. It was a hard year.

I was reflecting on this last week, as in the Christian world we were in the throws of celebrating Holy Week — our most solemn time of the Christian year. It coincided this year with the celebration of Passover, when our Jewish brothers and sisters recall their own story of the movement from slavery to freedom, from oppression to liberation. For both Jews and Christians we see this work of freedom as God's own work! We see this movement toward the recognition of each and every human being as someone possessing dignity and as God's own child, as a work of the Spirit of God, Himself!

God has given us the leaders we have needed in each age to tell the story, and inspire our movement forward as a people. Moses led the children of Israel.

Jesus took that message, through his apostles, to all the nations. And Dr. King was a man who reminded us, through his own proclamation of the truth and in committed non-violence, of God's message to us in our own time and in our own country.

One of Dr. King's most famous speeches was the speech he made in 1963 in Washington, D.C. It is famously referred to as his "I have a Dream," speech. He told us that he had seen a vision of our future as a people who were united, unafraid of each other, living in harmony — living the vision of what America is destined to be.

It is a beautiful dream, and one that we must keep before us now. But, Dr. King wasn't just a dreamer. He was a doer! He was a doer in so many important ways. He spoke truth to power! He denounced what was wrong, and worked to repair what was broken. He met with Presidents, Senators, Cabinet Secretaries, and whoever it took to make change happen. He listened to the weakest and most insignificant of people to know their needs and to mend their broken hearts. He confronted despair with hope, and darkness with light and fresh air! It is in his doing that we encounter his fuller legacy, beyond his words.

As we commemorate him now, 50 years after he was tragically taken from us, we are confronted not just with the ugliness of the past, but of much ugliness that remains in our society, today. The roots of racism have proven to be deeper and more persistent than we had realized. The chasms between rich and poor have widened. The desire to wall ourselves off from others whom we fear or resent has gripped us. It turns out that social divisions have once again captured and enslaved all of us as a people. And so, in honoring Dr. King, the most important thing we can do is to become doers — just like him!

We must cry out against the injustices we see! We must work the halls of power by proclaiming the truth of the dignity of each child of God! We must

embrace the peaceful means of forceful change! We have to grab back the agenda of love and freedom that is being stolen from us. Most of all, if we want to honor him, we cannot be complacent! We cannot fool ourselves into thinking this work is done and finished. Not while the single mom works two jobs and struggles for food to feed her young family. Not while the weary immigrant finds himself in jail and torn from his family. Not while our brave young men and women continue to die in lands far away. Not while working men and women face bankruptcy from medical bills. Not while the top 1% continue to gain more and more and everyone else gets less and less! Not while we treat our own planet like a trash can with no sense of responsibility for future generations. Not while our young people are gunned down in schools, shopping malls, or even just walking down the street! Not while our kids are living under the oppression of opiate addictions!

The dream is not dead. Its very much alive! Let's honor Dr. King now by being doers, ourselves! Let's keep on keepin' on! We won't be quiet! We won't rest. With God's help, inspired by God's grace, the dream lives on! Amen!