



grow. pray. study.

February 23, 2025 *The Only Way Forward*

Scripture: John 3:16, Luke 10:25-28 (CEB)

Let Justice Roll: God's Urgent Call

MONDAY 2.24.25 Amos 5:21-24

In April 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was jailed in Birmingham, AL for leading non-violent protests against the city's blatant racism. A group of Christian clergymen criticized Dr. King as an "extremist." He responded in the famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." * In that letter, he asked, "Was not Amos an extremist for justice: 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'?" Dr. King's question has as much resonance today as it did in 1963.

- It's only human to assume, in any situation that involves us, that we are the "good guys." That's what the eight clergymen to whom Dr. King responded assumed, even as they at least implicitly supported continuing racial segregation and the hate-filled actions it created. *** What moral hazards does that easy assumption create if it keeps us from examining our attitudes and actions? 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 loving justice and righteousness? What risks or costs do those choices involve? How willing are you to consistently act on God's call through Amos to allow divine love to "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.

* You can [click here](#) to read the full text of King's powerful letter.

** "Amos was a stern advocate for justice and righteousness (Amos 5:24), but he found Israel full of injustice and oppression (Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-13; 8:4-6). He charged the people with hypocritical worship (Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23) and idolatry (Amos 5:27; 5:26; 8:14)." —J. Andrew Dearman, introduction to Amos in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1454 OT.

** In his letter, Dr. King included examples for the clergy to consider: "I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together."

Jesus' message: turning our world right-side up

TUESDAY 2.25.25 Acts 17:2-8

Love isn't vaguely "spiritual"—it changes the world. Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry noted, "This movement was perceived as somehow reordering the way things were, 'turning the world upside down'.... the reason the movement was turning the world upside down was because members of the movement gave their loyalty to someone named Jesus and committed themselves to living and witnessing to his way above all else.... The way of Jesus will always turn our worlds and the world upside down, which is really turning it right-side up." *

- Opposing people or systems in power often feels like turning the world upside down. Whether in your home, your work, your friendships or your community and nation, those in power tend to want to stay in power, even if they are using their power in ways that oppose God's principles. Can you name a time when you opposed a powerful force for reasons of principle? What happened? Regardless of the visible outcome, how did doing that shape your inner self?
- Jesus was counter-cultural and regularly upset the *status quo* with his teachings and actions. The people who believed they were "in charge" rather quickly perceived him as a threat, despite his apparently lower status and power than theirs. Jesus' love tends to upset the *status quo* of your life when you become his disciple too. In what ways has Jesus turned your world upside down... or right-side-up?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I don't want to maintain the *status quo*. I'm ready for you to be in charge, to upset my life in the best way possible. Help me be a part of creating a world that is right-side-up. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 75). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Apostle Paul: an extremist for the Christian gospel

WEDNESDAY 2.26.25 Galatians 6:14-17

In his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Dr. King asked clergymen who termed his nonviolent protests against racism "extremist," "Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus'?" * Scholar N. T. Wright said that in Galatians, "The 'agitators' have been keen to mark the bodies of the Galatians with the sign that says they belong to the ethnic family of Abraham. Paul declares that the only marks that matter on his body are the wounds he has suffered as a result of his allegiance to Jesus (verse 17)." **

- Roman philosopher Cicero wrote, "The idea of the cross should never come near the bodies of Roman citizens." 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 said "what matters is a new creation") had changed his life. Do you trust in—even "boast in"—Jesus, the crucified king?
- N. T. Wright also wrote, "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." *** How has Jesus' love given you new life? How do you use your gifts, time and talents to share God's restoring, reviving work?

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

* You can [click here](#) to read the full text of King's powerful letter.

** Wright, N. T., *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 80). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

*** *Ibid.*, p. 82.

“Divine flame”—the gospel in poetry

THURSDAY 2.27.25 Song of Solomon 8:6-7

On May 19, 2018, over a billion people watched Bishop Michael Curry preach Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding ceremony. The couple chose today's reading as the text for their marriage. Bishop Curry summed up the Bible's meaning this way: “The message of God is very simple. Love one another. Take care of one another. Take care of creation. And while you're at it, love me—love God. Do that and you will find your way. That is the core of the gospel.” *

- Today's reading's passionate poetry saw human love growing out of God's love, extending and expressing it. The phrase “Its darts are darts of fire—divine flame!” was literally, in Hebrew, “a flame of Yah” (the short form of the divine name from Exodus 3:14). How did that phrase make our ability to love more than a mere biological drive, and link it at its best to God's serving, self-sacrificing love?
- We believe the Holy Spirit guided the shaping of the Hebrew Scriptures. Including Song of Solomon showed vividly that God created and affirms human love. The unmarried apostle Paul hinted that God gives some the gift of happily living celibate (cf. [1 Corinthians 7:2-7](#)), but the Scripture never said a celibate person is holier than one who faithfully loves another. When have you, in your life or the lives of people you care about, seen the beauty and holiness of committed human love?

Prayer: Lord God, you created me out of your love, and you planted a seed of that love deep within me. Let me always value and respect the holiness of that wonderful gift from your heart. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. xvi). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Jesus' love the source of our love

FRIDAY 2.28.25 John 13:34-35, 15:9-10

Bishop Michael Curry highlighted how the setting of Jesus' "new commandment" showed that loving is much more than a fuzzy, fluffy sentiment: "This was [the night] before Jesus' death, when he would show what love looks like; giving of the self, even sacrificing the self for the good and well-being of others." * The command to love one another was not new, but "as I have loved you" took "love" to a whole new level.

- Jesus began John 15:9 with ten key words: "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you." As the moon reflects the sun's light, our love for others reflects God's love for us. In what practical ways do you live out your commitment to love God and others? To what extent are you able to view self-giving, not self-gratification, as key to the kind of love that makes life genuinely worth living?
- Jesus showed the disciples what one writer called "a triad of love." The Father loves me, Jesus said. In the same way, I have loved you. Now, as I have loved you, love one another. We often fall short, but this kind of love is willing to do the hard work of binding wounds and working to reconcile. How does it bring you strength to know Jesus' love for you expresses God's eternal love? How can you live out Jesus' committed, steady love toward all the people in your life?

Prayer: O Lord, help me increasingly to love, not as an outward disguise to hide my anger or pain, but from my heart as your love overflows and bubbles out of me to bless others. Amen.

* Curry, Bishop Michael. *The Power of Love* (p. 19). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Jesus: the ultimate extremist for love

SATURDAY 3.1.25 Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-28

In 1963, Dr. King wrote from his cell in Birmingham's jail to clergymen who called his nonviolent protests of racism "extreme," "You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme.... 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'.... 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?" * Many first-century Romans and Judeans despised Jesus' "extremism" about love. Many secular and religious people today still refuse to accept Jesus' wisdom. But its light shines on and points us, in Pastor Johnson's words, to "the only way forward."

- Jesus' words about loving enemies and praying for those who mistreat us are as daring and challenging 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." On that basis, could Dr. King have accurately said that God is an extremist for love? Early Christian saint Augustine said, "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 self-care?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to love all people, 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.

* From [Letter from a Birmingham Jail \[King, Jr.\]](#).

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

Prayer Requests