

Jan 14, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 6: 9-10; "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou; Psalm 122; Matthew 10: 26-28.

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*"Go and say to this people. 'Listen and listen, but never understand. Look and look, but never perceive. Make this people's heart coarse, make their ears dull, shut their eyes tight—or they will use their eyes to see.'" [Isaiah 6: 9-10]*

The prophet James Baldwin said this, the contemporary expression of what the prophet Isaiah said 3000 years ago. Baldwin said, *'Even if I should speak the truth about racism, no one would believe me. And they would not believe me precisely because they would know that what I said was true.'*

'Even if I speak the truth about racism, no one will believe me, and they won't believe me precisely because they know what I'm saying is true.' It's the bind where we find ourselves, isn't it?

*"Hatred is a cup of poison I drink—hoping you die,"* said the Buddha. *"Hatred is a cup of poison I drink, hoping you die."* That cup of poison is overflowing these days, isn't it? Just overflowing. We are facing a moral reckoning. Right now—not someday in the future—today!

Will we become a multiracial democracy? Or not? Or not?

Martin Luther King said in 1968, just a couple months before his assassination, *"Sometimes I feel it's a losing battle for the soul of our nation. America is certainly a racist country. The problem can only be solved when there is a coalition of conscience among all of us—all of us"*. He never excluded white people, got that?  
*"The problem can only be solved when there is a coalition of conscience. But I'm not sure if we have too many consciences left. There aren't enough white people in our country who are willing to cherish democratic principles over privilege. I'm grateful to God that some are left, but too many have gone to sleep. And, we have to be that creative minority together, ready to do battle for the sacred issues of life, for the principles of justice, and good will, and beloved community."*

That's the open and fearless speech that Jesus is speaking of today—the consequences of which Jesus says, *"Don't fear those who can kill your body. Fear those who can kill the body and the soul."* [Matthew 10:28]

And there's a lot of soul-killing going on these days. The very soul of the nation is at stake. It is at risk. For death is not the ultimate Evil. The ultimate Evil is living without God's love and wisdom. That's what kills us. The root of our troubles is the LIE, the LIE: *'White people matter—more'*.

It's so simple, and vicious!

*"We're good people. Haven't we been raised that way? Our social identity—Americans are good people. We don't hurt anybody. We built this country from scratch, with our own hands—from the dirt all by ourselves. Yes, slavery happened. That's a terrible thing. It's too bad, but it's over. There are no consequences to it, are there?"*

The foundation of the American economy is 400 years of slavery. That's how we got here. Cotton is king. It was bigger than the entire industrial, northern economy combined...

*"But we did it ourselves. We aren't that bad. We really haven't done anything wrong (have we?)."*

King also said, 'Black people have been kept in oppression and deprivation by a poisonous fog of lies that depict us as inferior, born deficient, and deservedly doomed to servitude all the way to the grave. So long as the lie is believed, the brutality and criminality of conduct against black people is easy for the conscience to bear. You know what there?

And we've all been in those conversations that way. You know what they say, 'They're like the lie, and as long as we hide behind the LIE of race and Power. We are fulfilling what Isaiah said. *'Look and look and never perceive.'*" What is their problem? Listen and listen and never understand? Why do they have to ask so much of us? Hearts grow coarse, numb, dumbed-down. What is their problem?

I'm just quoting us, aren't I? And this is what the prophet Maya Angelou says with sassiness—*'We will not play your games anymore, no more. For we shall rise, we shall rise, right here right now.'*

Until we face this question, James Baldwin said, until we face this question, nothing will change. and here's the question:

*'Why do people of power, why does the upper caste, why do white people need someone less than them? Why? To prove you're somebody, that you got something, that you got some power? Why do you need someone less than you?'*

And the poet, prophet, Baldwin boldly asked the question in public, *'Why do you need niggas?'* To which he responded, publicly, *"I am not your nigger."* Open and fearless speech. Pretending it hasn't happened, pretending slavery and Jim Crow don't matter, is why it keeps going.

Do you know that Hitler and his cronies were inspired by racism in America? That's what they studied to hone the fascist weapons against Jews and others. The Nazis literally sent, in the 30's, scholars to teach at Southern universities so they could learn more about racism and its dynamics. And Hitler was impressed. He writes enthusiastically about it. This is amazing. His only complaint is 'Why did it take them 400 years?' And he intended to accomplish it in a decade.

The inspiration for Adolf Hitler—

*“Because even if I should speak, and tell them the truth about racism, no one would believe me. And they would not believe me precisely because they would know that what I said is true.”*

Martin Luther King was a moment in the conscience of humanity. Hear these words of his about non-violence, suffering, and the Cross.

*“The inseparable twin of racial injustice is economic injustice. I was introduced to the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. I became deeply fascinated by him. The Gandhian notion of satyagraha. Satya=Truth. Love. Graha= energy. Satyagraha means ‘Truth Force/ Love Force’. This was profoundly significant to me. I delved ever deeper into it and my skepticism concerning the power of Love gradually diminished. And I came to see for the first time, that the Christian doctrine of Love operating to the Gandhian method of non-violence is one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.*

*I would not wish to give the impression that non-violence will accomplish miracles overnight. People are not easily moved from their mental ruts or purged from their prejudice or irrational feelings. When the underprivileged demand Freedom, the privileged at first react with bitterness, and resistance, and, ‘What is their problem?’*

*Even when the demands are couched in nonviolent terms, the response is substantially the same. But non-violence gives hearts and souls to those committed to it a new sense of dignity and self-respect. It gives strength and courage people didn't know they had. It stirs the conscience even of the oppressors, and reconciliation can become a reality.*

*People who speak too much about their sufferings develop a martyr complex, and I do not want to present myself that way. Still, I must say that my sufferings have shaped my faith, my theology, and my choices due to my involvement in the struggle for the freedom of my people, I have known very few quiet days in the last few years. I have been imprisoned in Alabama and Georgia jails 12 times. (Every time he went in everyone expected him to get murdered.) 12 times. My home has been bombed— twice. And a day seldom passes that my family and I are not the recipients of death threats. I have been the victim of a near-fatal stabbing. So, in a real sense, I have been battered by the storms of persecution.*

*I must admit that at times I've been tempted to retreat to a more quiet and serene life, but every time such temptation appears, something strengthens and sustains my determination. I have learned now that the Lord's burden is light when we take his yoke upon us. My personal trials have also taught me the value of unmerited suffering. As my sufferings mounted, I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond—either with bitterness, or, seeking to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course, recognizing the necessity for suffering. I've tried to make of it a virtue, if only to save myself from bitterness, yes, but I've attempted to see my ordeals as an opportunity to transfigure myself and heal the people involved in this tragic situation.*

*Unearned suffering is redemptive. There are some who still find the Cross a stumbling block, others foolishness. But I'm more convinced than ever before that it is the power of God unto*

*social and personal salvation. Like the Apostle Paul, I now can humbly and proudly say I bear in my body the marks of our Lord Jesus. God has become profoundly real to me in these recent years—in the midst of loneliness and dreary nights—I heard a voice saying, “Lo, I am always with you.” And when the chains of fear and manacles and frustration. have stymied by efforts, I have felt the power of God. turning fatigue and despair into the buoyancy of hope.”*

Lo, I am always with you.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

2/2/24