

Jan 15, 2023. Second Sunday after Epiphany. Martin Luther King holiday.
Pr. Steve
Texts: 1 John 4: 18-19, '*The Strength to Love: The Antidote to Fear*'—MLK,
John 3: 6-8

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

Epiphany is a 'Season of Light' in the midst of the deepest darkness of the seasons--light shining in the midst to illumine our way. Yet it feels that there is a deluge washing over us. Do we live on land, or at sea? Can there be anything worse than fires raging without end? And this deluge--all around us--is also within us, isn't it?

The madness of these times, the absurdity of it all! I think it was reported on the news this week, "*Character doesn't matter anymore.*" Can I get an Alleluia?
'*Truth--nobody cares. We're beyond it. We've arrived!*'

From Brazil, to Uvalde, to the Ukraine, to Iran, to D.C.: *Violence--we're getting used to it now, finally, took a while...* And the complicity of silence by those who know better. Remember how Dr. King said, "*It's not the people who hate us who are the enemy. It's those who are indifferent. It's the silence of the good people who do nothing.*" The 'Deluge' doesn't seem to stop. And fear, of course. It's a great poison. It works so well, you don't need anything else, just fear. 'Be afraid, be afraid!'

More than 60 years ago, Dr. King warned us: '*The soul of the nation is at stake!*' Most of us said, '*Well, you know, I don't know if it's that bad.*' Militarism. Materialism. Racism. The soul of the nation is at stake. Now, it couldn't be clearer, is it? The soul of the nation, ours and others, is at stake.

That's why I so appreciate what I call the 'Coffee Pot Prayer'. Just like really good coffee, when you're at that breaking point, coffee will help break through.

The threats around Dr. King, and all of us, are real, but a transcendent peace is possible in the midst. As Dr. King said, "*Death, my friends, is not the ultimate evil.*" That's what fear would have us believe--the raging fears that seem so endless. Death is not the ultimate threat. The ultimate threat is living without God's love.

'*Come to me, you who are weary,*' Jesus says, '*and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on your shoulders, and learn from me, for I am gentle, and humble of heart.*'

[Matthew 11:28] Your souls will find rest. Your souls will find rest. *'For my yoke is easy compared to everything you're carrying. My yoke is easy, and my burden, light. Come to me. Come to me. 'You, feeling broken, exhausted, at a loss--just come.'* Lay it down at the altar. Come. It's not yours to carry alone anymore. Come. This is as easy as dropping it off.

The experience we're all sharing in common is called Crucifixion. And just like the crucifixion of Christ 2000 years ago, at the heart and core of it is a sense of feeling at a loss, don't know where to turn. Like Dr. King, [you've] tried everything. [He said] *'I'm usually a very strategic thinker. I can figure things out.'* It's not working, is it? The first step of freedom is to acknowledge it's not working.

At the heart and core of the Crucifixion is that experience of powerlessness. The thing we detest more than anything else in life is to be powerless--and that's Christ on the cross. And yet, it becomes a pivot point for the faith. We begin to see through the emptiness, we see through our own exhaustion. And in time, we're given the compassion to see the light.

Gia, we are so happy you're baptized today. We're so happy for who you are, and the beauty of God that already shines within you. You delight us with your energy, and inquisitive mind, and the joy, and your willingness to dance in life and in God. Most of all we are blessed by you. And we find it a blessing to know that you will be reminded for the rest of your lifetime--how much you are loved by the friends around you, the people around you, the prayers that surround you.

Against all impossible odds, God keeps stirring new life--as the wind cannot be contained. Are we 7 storms in, or 9--I keep forgetting. [how many atmospheric rivers of water with high winds in California during January 2023]. *The wind cannot be contained.* Oh you incredibly powerful human beings who think you've got your act together in controlling the world and life, *you can't even contain the wind'!*

So it is with the Spirit who moves within us to endlessly create life anew. That's why we keep our focus there--on the One who breathes change and possibility. Our God is able to speak to us in the depths of our heart. Our God is able to transform what is breaking us. Our God is able to heal what seemingly can never be made whole. Our God is able to hold us in the midst of the storms of life.

Dr. King had a great friend--he occasionally told her story--her name was Mother Pollard. She was an old woman, no formal education, poverty-stricken, marched

with Dr. King all around the South, for how many years? Finally, friends came to her one day. They said, 'Mother Pollard, you must be tired!' and she said, "*My feet is tired, but my soul is at rest.*"

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

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