

It is the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the New Year. For many people including myself, those resolutions we made at the beginning of the year are beginning to fade. The visions of our perfection once so bright and promising, no longer seem as possible. We don't have the energy and we don't have the time to make the changes we wanted to in our lives. We settle into being the broken people we are and go on with our lives thinking that perhaps our vision was more than we can manage. We are not ready. Our hour is not yet come.

It is good to have Jesus in our company when it comes to not being ready as he declares to his mother that his hour has not yet come. Jesus, his disciples and his mother are at a wedding and the wine has run out. His mother wants him to take care of the lack of wine. He addresses her - a little rudely to my ears – Woman, what does this have to do with you and me? My hour has not come. For whatever reason, Jesus was not ready to begin his ministry. But this did not deter his mother. She trusted in her son and instructed the servants to do whatever he told them. Jesus told the servants to fill these six great big containers with water and then to draw from them. They do what he says and all that water is turned into amazingly good wine. Six twenty gallon containers of wine – way more than was needed. It was an abundance of good wine. This is what happens when the Spirit is around. When God is present, what was empty is filled to overflowing and the disciples believe. Jesus reveals his glory, his Spiritual gifts, and embarks on a ministry that transforms the world.

How do we answer the call to action when we feel that we are not ready that hour had not yet come? There is so much to be done in this world. The problems are so big and there is so much injustice. How can we even begin when we feel unready and unprepared? We are broken people just trying to get through life. What difference can we make in this world if we can't stick with an exercise program or setting aside quiet time each day?

This weekend, we remember the life of Dr Martin Luther King. In my preparation for this sermon, I was reading through his papers from the time of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama and was fascinated that in many ways he might have not felt ready to be the leader of the civil rights movement. At the time, Dr. King had just finished his doctorate. He had recently moved to Montgomery and had a new church that needed his time. He needed to spend time with his family with a brand new baby daughter all of 2 weeks old. And then on Dec 1 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving a white bus rider her seat. This sparked a protest on Dec 5 where African Americans refused to ride the buses in Montgomery. On the afternoon of the protest, which had been amazingly successful, some African American community leaders gathered together to discuss the need for organization to guide and direct the protest. Dr. King was among them and he was unanimously elected the president of the newly formed organization. Just three weeks before, Dr. King had turned down the presidency of the local chapter of the NAACP. He and his wife had decided that he

should not then take on any heavy community responsibilities, since he had so recently finished his doctoral thesis, and needed to give more attention to his church work.<sup>1</sup> Yet he said yes to his election. Dr. King writes that the action caught him unawares and that it was probably that if he had time to think it through, he would have declined the nomination. But he didn't and he went forward to become the leader of the civil right movement which changed the way things were for black people in the United States.

That night after that election, Dr. King went home to write a speech – a speech to be given at an evening mass meeting where the community leaders who had elected him their president were hoping to ascertain if the people were willing to continue the protest for however long it took the bus company to change their rules. If the people did not seem enthusiastic, then they thought it might be best to end the protest. The argument was that if they stopped now, they would have shown united strength to the white community and they could get anything they wanted from the bus company, simply because the company would think that the protest could happen again. If the protest continued, and most of the people returned to the buses tomorrow or the next day, the protesters would become a laughing stock and, and it would have been all for nothing.

What Martin Luther King said that night at that meeting could inspire the people or not. He went home with about 20 minutes to write the speech. He writes that he was faced “with the inescapable task of preparing, a speech that was expected to give a sense of direction to a people imbued with a new and still unplumbed passion for justice.” He writes that he was now almost overcome, obsessed by a feeling of inadequacy and in a state of anxiety. He writes that “With nothing left but faith in a power whose matchless strength stands over against the frailties and inadequacies of human nature, I turned to God in prayer. My words were brief and simple, asking God to restore my balance and to be with me in a time when I needed His guidance more than ever.”

And he succeeded. Three hundred and eighty one days later the bus protest ended when the court order, upheld by the US Supreme Court, mandating an end to bus segregation finally arrived in Alabama. Whatever, Dr. King said that night, however inadequate he might have felt, and whatever state of unreadiness his life was in, he inspired the people to boycott the buses for 381 days. He inspired people who were not rich to take cabs, to find rides or to walk for miles to get to work and what they did made a big difference in the United States. It was not easy. In many ways, Dr. King wasn't ready for this role that he took up, but the abundance and power of his cause is still evident today. The Spirit must have been with him.

What will raise us to action – to do God's work in this world? What will bring us to the place where we use our gifts to change the world? How will we get away from thinking, “I am too small, too busy, too stressed out and in too much pain to do God's

work?” But God can use just as we are. God’s asks us to trust in the abundance of God’s spirit.

We all feel not ready. We feel empty, as if our wine has run out as if we cannot take on the pain of the world. The injustice and trouble in the world is great. Famine, AIDS, people without homes, people barely getting by on minimum wage all tug at our hearts. Racism is still present as well as all the other “isms” that one can think of. We are at war. People are ill. The problems in our world are so great that it is not hard to see that one might not feel ready to face them. Most of take one look and feel like pulling the covers over our heads or going to hide in a cave. But I don’t think that is what God calls us to do. God is calling us out in the world to be who we are, to make a difference in our way whether we feel ready or qualified.

My latest favorite book is called “Praying for Dear Life”<sup>ii</sup> and the author describes Jesus’ calling us into the world. He writes, “Jesus will not let his friends remain too long in their caves or under the covers before calling them back to the cold, hard world. Those who love him and have answered his call may have glimpses of heaven and such dreams of the Day to make them beg for more sleep; they may have mountaintop moments where they long to pitch tents or build chapels and remain there. But Jesus keeps calling us back down the mountain, back into life, back to the world where people and things are sometimes so cold and hard. Where there is meanness and sadness and disappointment, but also waiting sisters and grieving friends, prayers to be prayed and work to do.”

Jesus calls us. Jesus calls us in whatever state we are in. When we come forward, when we say yes, the Spirit steps in and amazing things are possible. It is like the abundance of wine at the wedding at Cana. We do more than we could ever have imagined. We all have a call to action – a call to follow in the footsteps of those like Martin Luther King who have gone before us - a call to make a difference in the world. We go forward knowing that we can do God’s work in the world whether we feel ready or not.

God calls us. Let us answer. Let us step forward and make a difference in this world in the way that God created us to, using the gifts that God has given us. Sometimes, our hour is at hand even though nothing in us says that we are ready for that work. With God, it is possible. With the Spirit, it is possible. In the same way that the stone jars are filled with water and that water turned to an abundance of wine, our emptiness, our brokenness is filled and we can go out and be the people of God in this world.

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<sup>i</sup> [The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/mlkpapers/), Chapter 7, Clayborne Carson, ed., New York: IPM/Warner Books, 2001, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/mlkpapers/>

<sup>ii</sup> Praying for Dear Life, Thomas Steagald, Navpress, Colorado Press, CO, 20006.