



University Christian Church – Austin

C. Kutz-Marks

The Audacity of Belief

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Is. 62:1-5

I hope that you had the chance to read the article in yesterday's *Austin American Statesman* about the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr. who is speaking at several sites here in Austin this weekend and who was a colleague in the Civil Rights ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.. At 74 years young Rev. Moss is still a passionately vocal advocate for Christian involvement in justice and peace concerns worldwide, but especially calling us American Christians- with our power and our influence on the world stage- to live out our higher calling to be “a light to the nations.”

Our reading from Is. 62 reflects the very same Biblical imperative. “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.” These words came as a comfort to people who have felt beleaguered and beset on every side. The prophet Isaiah brings a word of both challenge and comfort. God is doing something new in you, Israel, making you the vanguard of the new way that God intends all the world to experience. You are to become the model that others will follow to find their own fulfillment as well.

Rev. Moss is here saying that that very same challenge is set before us American Christians at the dawn of the 2nd decade of the 21st century. He believes that the election of President Obama is a sign of the progress that our nation has made internally in growing from slavery and segregation towards the equality of races. He also sees in the Obama administration an unprecedented opportunity for the U.S. to regain status in the

world community as the model of a powerful government ready to use that power for justice and peace in the broadest sense of those words, rather than for our narrow national interests. But Rev. Moss is clear that we've a long way to go on all of these fronts.

It is instructive to remember President Obama's words a few weeks ago as he accepted the Nobel Peace prize:

“I am both surprised and deeply humbled by the decision of the Nobel Committee. Let me be clear: I do not view it as a recognition of my own accomplishments, but rather as an affirmation of American leadership on behalf of aspirations held by people in all nations.

To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who've been honored by this prize -- men and women who've inspired me and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace.

But I also know that this prize reflects the kind of world that those men and women, and all Americans, want to build -- a world that gives life to the promise of our founding documents. And I know that throughout history, the Nobel Peace Prize has not just been used to honor specific achievement; it's also been used as a means to give momentum to a set of causes.”

How very different from the circumstances 45 years earlier in 1964 when the building momentum for the Civil Rights cause was beginning to be understood in the world community and when Dr. King gave his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace prize:

“I accept the Nobel Prize for Peace at a moment when twenty-two million Negroes of the United States of America are engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice. I accept this award in behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice.

I am mindful that only yesterday in Birmingham, Alabama, our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death. I am mindful that only yesterday in Philadelphia, Mississippi, young people seeking to secure

the right to vote were brutalized and murdered. And only yesterday more than 40 houses of worship in the State of Mississippi alone were bombed or burned because they offered a sanctuary to those who would not accept segregation.

I am mindful that debilitating and grinding poverty afflicts my people and chains them to the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

Therefore, I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize.

After contemplation, I conclude that this award which I receive on behalf of that movement is profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time -- the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression.

Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts. Negroes of the United States, following the people of India, have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation. Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood.

If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. The tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama, to Oslo bears witness to this truth. This is a road over which millions of Negroes are traveling to find a new sense of dignity.

I accept this award today with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind. I refuse to accept despair as the final response to the ambiguities of history. I refuse to accept the idea that the "isness" of man's present nature makes him morally incapable of reaching up for the eternal "oughtness" that forever confronts him.

I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life

unable to influence the unfolding events which surround him. I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant....

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down, men other-centered can build up. I still believe that one day mankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land.”

The question for you and me today is whether or not we also have the audacity to believe, as did Dr. King, that God is still taking the human soul, and all human community, forward to somewhere new and better, somewhere a quantum leap higher. Some would point to the differing circumstances of Dr. King and Pres. Obama at Oslo, one as political outsider & the other as sitting President, as proof of that evolution. I hope most of you would agree with Dr. King that continuing progress is, indeed, possible.

But it will take an even more potent faith on our part, faith that even Dr. King didn't himself fully have yet as he left Boston University with his doctorate in theology, faith enough to believe that the way forward is on the path of nonviolent resistance to evil. There are precious few examples in our world of nonviolent resistance on any large scale being attempted. But with India gaining its independence from Britain and with the success of the Civil Rights movement here in the US, we are deeply challenged

to examine the mature Dr. King's claim that non-violence is the way forward for individuals, for groups, and even for nations. For if we come to the same conclusions Dr. King did, our politics, our view of the role of government, and our expectations of how God works in the world...will all be dramatically changed... and to embrace those new understandings, to ready our spirits to become an active part of that huge stride forward.

So later today, or at least tomorrow, actively use this set apart time of reflecting:

(1) Spend a hour or more reading the works of Martin Luther King Jr. (2) Remind yourself, your children, grandchildren, neighbors, what it means to stand up for the needs and rights of the oppressed,

(3) Dig into your Bible to review Jesus' radical message of love that doesn't just suffer the world, but seeks to change the world. A good place to start is where Dr. King did, in the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter Five of Matthew.

(4) Try to look at the world with God's eyes. Where is injustice and oppression near us? What are the places where you, or we together as a congregation, might speak out on behalf of those who are not properly valued by our society, where God's vision of our fundamental equality call us to take a stand.

Today, and tomorrow, in a special, intentional way, LISTEN. Let the tuning fork of your soul begin to hum in response to God's call. And then, like the faithful of all ages, leave today's way behind so that you may embrace the new and better way God offers.

Let us pray:::~::~:

Lord of heaven and of earth, in the midst of this often overwhelming rush of life, we pause now....to listen... to listen for Your guidance..

Asking that we might hear in the voice of Your prophets,
where ever,,, and however it comes,
Grant us a hunger to know your will,

Grant us the patience to discern your way, and then
Grant us the fortitude to stand in the power of that new understanding,
We pray in the name of our prophet, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.