

1A Service of Lessons and African American Spirituals

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1 John 4:7-8, 17-18

Mark 10:35-40, 43-44

John 1:35-50

People change sometimes. I've even heard of people changing from being Cubs fans to Sox fans, and vice versa. Sometimes people even change from being Bears fans to Green Bay Packer fans, or vice versa. In the last election we had people who had voted for a Republican before but, surprisingly, vote for the Democratic candidate. Sometimes people make changes in who they follow and what they believe in.

Recently I heard a young woman talk about going to the "Dead" concert and actually inviting her 60 year old grandparents, who had always been against this kind of music and what it stands for, they said "yes, I think we will go; you know, life is too short, we've got to go and see what this is all about." Stranger things have happened than grandparents at a Dead concert.

Sometimes changes are fairly value neutral – going from the Sox to the Cubs, Green Bay Packers to the Bears. You can argue both ways, but sometimes changes are for good things and for good reasons. Sometimes changes are life changing. Take the person who struggles with addiction who celebrates their first or second or third, or tenth year of sobriety. That's a positive change. In our lives we often make changes, dramatic changes during the course of our lives, and sometimes these changes are profound.

Today in our Gospel we have a leader, a teacher, John the Baptizer. He has devoted followers who have decided that they want to learn his ways, they want to be like John, and they have left their families and followed him and learned from him. Then their teacher John says, "There is another person you should be following. His name is Jesus." John the Baptizer actually encourages these disciples to switch schools to become followers of Jesus, instead of himself.

This prophet, this leader, this teacher, this spiritual leader John evangelizes his very own disciples by calling Jesus the Lamb of God. John saw something very different in Jesus which convinces him to encourage others to follow Jesus, instead of himself. And, then once these disciples were in Jesus' presence, they too see for themselves. They make a change; they want to follow Jesus, and they do just that.

There are a whole line of converts in our lesson. Andrew goes and evangelizes his brother Simon Peter. Then Philip is invited to come along; then Philip evangelizes Nathanael, and so on. Sometimes the disciple, the follower, invites and sometimes Jesus invites others himself to join his way of thinking, his way of seeing the world.

Jesus' disciples were very excited, and they went out and they told others about this new teacher named Jesus.

Jesus, later in the book of John, evangelizes a woman who had nothing, an outcast Samaritan woman at the well who says, "I know you; I know all about you. It's not pretty, is it? But I still love you; I still accept you." Then she goes and tells her people, "Come and see this man who has told me everything I have ever done. He can't be the Messiah, can he?" And they come and see, and they listen to Jesus and what he is teaching, and they see new ways, as well. They become his disciples; they follow him. And then they invite their friends, and so on. We have had this process going on for two thousand years of hearing about Jesus and his new way of telling someone, of inviting someone, of spreading the Good News. Who invited you to be a disciple of Jesus? Who have you taught to follow?

Today we're lifting up Martin Luther King, Jr. as one who was invited to follow Jesus, to see the world through Jesus' eyes. Martin Luther King, Jr. decided to follow. He decided to follow the teachings of Jesus. He saw things in different ways through this lens, and he saw that the way that things were was not right. And when we look back on his life, on his ministry, not to mention what he accomplished in the Civil Rights Movement, we look at the long history in our country before that, and in others, of people being treated poorly based on one thing – that they're different, they don't

have power. We're talking about slavery, treating women as second-class citizens, or forcing people who are not in the majority to sit in the back of the bus, to drink from a different water fountain, or to learn in segregated schools. We tell our young people this today and they say, "It couldn't really have been like that; that's not real is it?" But it was real. There were people like Martin Luther King, Jr., who caught Jesus' vision, God's spirit, and worked so that others would have a better future.

Some people are on the front edge of positive change, like Martin Luther King. Some are in the middle; and some are behind the curve.

So today we learn from past disciples, past followers of Jesus, and how they caught the vision, the vision of love, the vision of transformation. Whether it's people like Peter or Paul, Martin Luther, or Martin Luther King, Jr., they have paved the way for a better future, a new vision of what the future can be.

So, as followers of Jesus, we can either be right there with him, with our teacher Jesus, seeing what he sees, from this same vantage point, from the same angle, with the same heart of compassion and love, or we can read about it later in a history book, when someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. takes care of things. But the reality is history is being made right now, and you and I are a part of it. There are a lot of things we can do once we see through the eyes of Jesus, see things in new ways.

I'd like to lift up one example that has inspired me a great deal about what we can do when we see things in a new way, that can change history. I'm going to talk about a problem that can be

solved, and we'll look at it in new ways that transforms. The problem is extreme poverty. We can be known as Jesus' followers, as Jesus' disciples who had a vision of saving lives by helping to end extreme poverty which kills ten million people each year.

When we look back over the last half century we see the two greatest humanitarian challenges that were faced. Championed by followers of Jesus, by his disciples, who had a new vision— the Civil Rights Movement and the peaceful end of apartheid in South Africa.

There is a new vision for how to end extreme poverty. The reality is that we are making progress, great progress. Ending poverty could be the greatest humanitarian opportunity in our time.

Will ending extreme poverty rise to the level of priorities for us as Jesus' followers, looking at the world through Jesus' lens, as did the Civil Rights Movement or ending apartheid in South Africa? That's the question we need to ask ourselves. If not that, then what are we going to be known for? What are people going to say about us forty or fifty years from now? How can we help? It seems overwhelming. I'll just throw a practical solution out. It's called microfinance. It's created a way to invest, to invest in ending poverty. It's a tool that's been used for quite sometime. It's helped millions of people find their way out of poverty.

In 1964 Martin Luther King, at the age of 35, received the Nobel Peace Prize. Fast-forward forty-two years to 2006 Muhammed Yunus from Grameen Bank in Bangladesh received the Nobel Peace Prize for his, over thirty years, of helping end extreme poverty using microfinance. The time is now; we can make a difference. We are making history as we speak.

The good thing about microfinance is it doesn't rely on somebody else. It doesn't rely on the government. It relies on people like you and me and the private sector. It relies on poor people who use loans as small as \$100 and their own initiative to work their way out of poverty.

Today, we are Jesus' modern disciples in a long tradition of followers of Jesus, like Martin Luther King and others who have changed the world with God's vision of a new future. Amen.