

Catonsville Nine--50th Anniversary
May 6, 2018
Salem Lutheran Church
905 Frederick Rd.
Catonsville, Maryland
6:30pm

Good Evening and thanks to everyone for making this remembrance so personal, so political, and so prayerful. This is a powerful memory of the past and a prophetic encouragement for the future and what we now face. This weekend we are honoring the prophets of another time who stood in our stead and represented all of us in the face of an unjust war. We are grateful for their witness, their sacrifice, their tenacity, their prophetic action, and their unwavering commitment to peace and justice and to calling America to be its best self: Thank you, Dan Berrigan, Phil Berrigan, David Darst, John Hogan, Tom Lewis, Marjorie Bradford Melville, Thomas Melville, George Mische, and Mary Moylan. You changed the course of a Nation, you changed the course of our lives, and you inspired many others to follow. So in your honor we "lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring, Ring with the harmonies of liberty"---today "let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies--and let it resound loud as the rolling stream". We have not given up. Today is not just a memory of what was, it is a commitment to what will be. We want you to know that we will "march on until victory is won". (Lift Every Voice and Sing--James Weldon Johnson).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and other preachers and orators have used the following quote to help us understand the dilemma we are in at any given time. There is some discrepancy as to the exact translation, but the spirit is true nonetheless.

We can tonight agree with Dante that " 'the hottest places in hell are reserved for those,

who in a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality '. There comes a time when silence is betrayal." These words are difficult to hear, because we cannot allow silence, or the violence of silence to overtake us.

You remember, I am sure these words! "Fools" said I, "You do not know Silence like a cancer grows. Hear my words that I might teach you Take my arms that I might reach you', But my words like silent raindrops fell and echoed in the wells of silence".

"And the sign said "The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls and whispered in the sounds of silence". (The Sounds of Silence-- Simon and Garfunkel).

We are so glad that the Sounds of Silence did not overtake the Catonsville Nine, We are so glad they overcame the temptation to be silent. We are so glad that they spoke and acted.

There comes a point in all of our lives when we can no longer go along with the path that our elders and leaders have laid out for us.

It is not easy to oppose your government at any time, but it is important to note that "dissent and disloyalty are not to be equated. Many people will use any means to silence dissent, even calling dissent, "Fake News"!! (If you know what I mean?)

Dr. King was known as a Civil Rights Leader, but as he put the pieces together about Civil Rights, Segregation, Integration, and the Vietnam War, he began to see greater connections. On April 4, 1967, a year to the day on which he was assassinated, He spoke at the Riverside Church in New York and the full understanding of his thinking and the political connections was made known. He could not remain silent any longer, either. He said, "I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the

poor and to attack it as such....it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem." I wonder tonight if you can hear the seeds of the Black Lives Matter movement in these words of Dr. King. But these were similar words of Medgar Evers almost 17 years earlier when he became a Civil Rights Worker. He said that when he was in France during WWII, he was free to walk the streets dating a white woman if he chose to do so. He was not able to do that in Jackson, Mississippi, his home town. He joined the Civil Rights Movement to make a change here in the USA. He was assassinated on June 12, 1963 in his home town. Dr. King said that " we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools".

Thomas Merton, who also died in 1968, carries on this theme of Dr. King. In 1965 he wrote that "We are living in the greatest revolution in history----a huge spontaneous upheaval of the entire human race: not the revolution planned and carried out by any particular party, race, or nation, but a deep elemental boiling over of all the inner contradictions that have ever been in man, a revelation of the chaotic forces inside everybody. This is not something we have chosen, nor is it something we are free to avoid. This revolution is a profound spiritual crisis of the whole world..."

If that was true then, you can only imagine what Merton would say today!

Dr. King said that "the war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American Spirit". Has this malady that King refers to, or the spiritual crisis that Merton refers to been addressed in our own time? We still have a choice today, Dr. King says "nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. We must move past indecision to action. If you can walk, and you can breathe, and you can think, and you can pray, then action still needs to be taken by you and I.

Where is our spiritual center and where is our ethical center? Whose voices are being raised to give us hope? Are we listening to Black Lives Matter, the Youth from Margery Stoneman Douglas High School, the youth in our own schools and families? as the violence continues and has spread from other countries to our own city streets.

The Words of hope come from poems, and scripture, and songs. Dr. Walter Brueggemann tells us that if the dominant version of reality is violence than the church is called to preach the Sub--Version, and if preached well enough, it becomes a subversion of the dominant version and gives people hope.

Dr. Brueggemann says that the source of violence is: 1) Deprivation, 2) Breakdown of community connections, and 3) silence. The antidote is: 1) Bread and meeting peoples' needs, 2) solidarity in community, and 3) listening to another's story and helping them find their voice.

Alice Walker in her book, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, tells the story of the young African woman named Tashi who killed the woman that mutilated her as a teen ager. As Tashi is tried and convicted, her arguments express her dignity, strength, and the recovery of herself. As soldiers line the roadway to her execution, Tashi's friends boldly walk through them. They show up on the other side of the field from where she will be

executed. They unroll a banner over the wall that gives her, her final message of what she was able to accomplish.

The banner says that says, "Resistance is the Secret of Joy".

So, my brothers and sisters, I call you to a continual spirit of resistance in the spirit of those we honor this night. Resist!!!

There is so much to do that we cannot give up. So much that came from a dishonest war that still resonates in our society. So we, too, continue to Resist!!

WE RESIST THE WALL--
WE RESIST THE DIVIDING OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES THROUGH DEPORTATION--
WE RESIST THE SLOW DISMANTLING OF OUR GOVERNMENT BY THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION--
WE RESIST THE PLETHORA OF GUNS ON OUR STREETS--
WE RESIST THE VIOLENCE THAT CRUSHES OUR FAMILIES--
WE RESIST NEGATIVE WORDS AND DISCRIMINATE ACTONS AGAINST GAY AND LESBIAN PEOPLE---
WE RESIST RACISM--
WE RESIST THE DESTRUCTIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY AS TERRORISTS--
WE RESIST THE MISTREATMENT OF WOMEN--
WE RESIST THE CONTINUAL MARGINALIZATION OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES ACROSS OUR NATION--
WE RESIST THE UNITED STATES AS THE LEADING ARMS SELLER IN THE WORLD--
WE RESIST THE PRISON INDUSTRY AS ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING INDUSTRIES IIN AMERICA..

WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS CULTURAL LINES, ECONOMIC LINES, NEIGHBORHOOD LINES, COLOR LINES, AND RELIGIOUS LINES---
WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO A NEW SOCIETY, NOT YET ACCOMPLISHED, BUT SEEN IN OUR HEARTS---
WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO NEVER STOP DREAMING OF WHAT WE CAN BE---
WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE CARE OF CREATION AND THE EARTH ON WHICH WE LIVE---

Let the reality of this story take root in you. When it does, you will stand strong as a community and proclaim that the story has not always been easy, but you are not going away, and you are not alone.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath The hand
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

THANK YOU TO THE CATONSVILLE NINE FOR THE MEMORY OF THIS NIGHT!!

THANK YOU FOR THE HOPE YOU HAVE GIVEN US!!

THANK YOU FOR THE FUTURE THAT WE NOW LIVE!!

Fr. Joe Muth

Sources:

Possessing the Secret of Joy by Alice Walker

The Word Militant: Preaching a Decentering Word by Dr. Walter Brueggemann

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Speech at Riverside Church in New York April 4, 1967

The Sounds of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel

Lift Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander by Thomas Merton

Peace in the Post-Christian Era by Thomas Merton