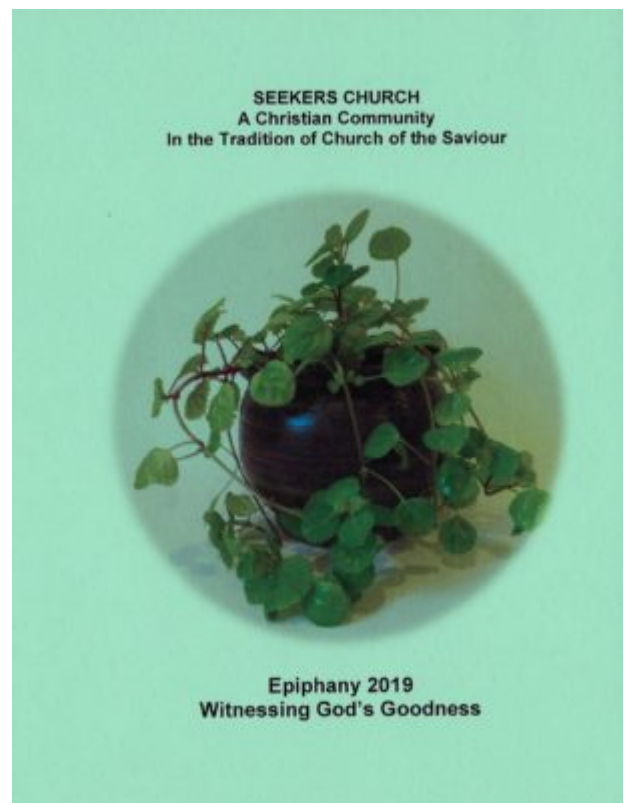


A Sermon on MLK, Compassion, and Racial Sensitivity by Larry Rawlings

January 20, 2019



The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Good morning. I almost didn't make it back up here. When I saw Brad and Melody here, I knew that Dakota was downstairs so I went downstairs visit to Dakota. He loves to be held and I didn't want to let him go but I knew I had to go and come back up here.

I also want to wish everyone a Happy National Cheese Lovers' Day. Today is Cheese Lovers' Day. I kind of follow the national days. I started watching Channel Five news and they tell you every day what national day it is. And so I kind of looked it up and discovered today is National Cheese Lovers'

Day and I love cheese.

The last couple of weeks it's been—I've had to do with the most sadness have had to deal with in my life. And I've had my grandfather die, my brothers die and stuff. But you know, a dog that I absolutely adored and loved for the last 16 years, we had to put him down. And Ripkin had become—I've been bringing Ripkin into this church for 10 years, back and forth, back and forth. And so it's rough to do at the very end. But when he was laying there and about to get an injection I said to him, "Ripkin, there's nothing we can do to save you. No medicine, no vet, no priest or anything." He was really bad and so I had to let him go. He was around for 16 years and so I have good memories of 16 years of that dog.

If you've ever had put pet down, it is a hard, hard thing to do, but it is the right thing to do. At the time he couldn't even walk. You know we had that big snowstorm the other day? He would love to have been able to go out and learn to the snow. But his hips were gone and his back legs were gone. He couldn't have done anything out there. I would have been miserable. I would, of course, try to get him out there, like an idiot. But he would have been just miserable and it was hurtful. But we have to do those things.

So the last bit of rambling I'm going to do for you guys is to root for the Kansas City Chiefs and a New Orleans Saints today. Okay. And the Saints in the Super Bowl. How about that?

But this is a Martin Luther King sermon. As you know, I've done this a couple of times. So I read a lot about Martin Luther King. And today I'm just going to talk a little bit about his history. It was a little bit similar to mine. He was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He was the second child of Martin Luther King, Senior. His father was a pastor and his mother, Alberta Williams King, was a school teacher. Along with his older brother and sister, Christine, he grew up in the city in an area called the Sweet Arbor

neighborhood, then home to some of the most prominent and prestigious African-Americans in the country.

For some reason I decided to go along with the term African-American because I don't use the term African-American. I just say Black because that's how I identify myself is Black The whole African-American thing that doesn't set so well with me in a way. I did it for this sermon, though.

A gifted student, King attended a segregated public school like I did but at the age of 15, he was admitted to Morehouse. I wasn't. That was the alma mater of both his father and his paternal grandfather, where he studied medicine and law. Initially, he did not want to follow his father's footsteps into the ministry but changed his mind under the mentorship of Morehouse President Dr. Benjamin Mays, an outspoken advocate for racial equality.

Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott, a young singer, were married in 1953 and settled in Montgomery, Alabama, where he became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. They had four children: Yolanda, Martin III, Dexter, and Bernice.

Martin Luther King, Jr. worked with the number of religious groups to organize the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, a peaceful political rally designed to shed light on the injustices African Americans continues to face across the country. Held on August 28 and attended by nearly 300,000 people, the event was historical

The March on Washington created King's most famous address, known as the "I Have a Dream" speech, a spirited call for the peace and equality, considered a masterpiece by many. Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a monument to the President who a century earlier had brought down the institution of slavery in the United States, he shared his vision of in which the nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self

evident that all men are created equal.”

Although that statement sounds good theoretically, it is simply not true. This country is and remains divided by race, and our own newly-elected president seems to be doing everything that he can just keep that separation of part of our daily lives, unfortunately.

Being a member of this church for nearly 10 years, with a surety I can say that diversity is our strength. Look around. However, it is the time of the year when we try to become more diverse by flying in the singing Africans from Bokamoso. I've sat down and had conversation with the Bokamoso youths but have no real connection with this group. I started preparing and setting up their meals.

Raise your hand if you're familiar with a guy named Andrew B. Oh, John knows Andrew. Andrew is a homeless guy at the 7-11. Quite often he's over there, wanting a handout. I remember one day I saw him standing on the corner and it was really cold outside. And I knew we had all these gloves to give out. And so I invited him into the church and I got him a pair of gloves. And what he had shown me was that the night before he slipped and fell, and he cut his wrist, and it was bleeding all over place.

Okay, so I have this homeless guy in the church. It's cold outside. I offer him gloves, but yet he's bleeding, you know. And so I decided that, well, what do I do? Do I give him a Band-Aid and send them on his way? Or do I try to help him? And I decided to humble myself, because first in my mind, I'm not going to touch him. Seriously, that's right, I was "I'm not going to touch him." I'm not going to touch him.

But I had to in order to help this guy because he was not going to be able to put that Band-Aid on his hand himself. And so I did. I just washed my hands afterwards. But, you know that took a lot of courage for me because he's smelly. He's

probably got lice or something. I don't want to be near him. "Here, take your gloves and go." But I decided, okay, I'll do the right thing. And I came upstairs I got our first aid kit and I sprayed some stuff on him and wrapped him up. He's got a little mental thing going on, and so we had whatever conversation we could possibly have. And I gave him \$1 for bus fare like I normally do and gave him the gloves. And I remember I said to him, "This is only pair of gloves I'm going to give you this year so you better hold on to them." Because you know he won't. He's a homeless guy he just won't. But I did the best I could to help him.

You know sometimes when those challenges come in front of you, my mind says "well, if that happens to me here's what I'm going to do." But when it actually happens to you what are you going to do? and that's that's always the question. Okay, so he's a homeless guy who hangs out at the 7-11. John knows him and I know him and Liz also knows him.

See, my mind tells me we have no problem spending tens of thousands of dollars to fly in and feed the singing Africans. But who among us would bother to prepare a plate of leftover food from the Bokamoso lunch and walk it over to the 7-11 and give it to someone who is less fortunate than we are, somebody who does not have the means?

You know, it's a really simple thing to do. But you know what, it's not that we don't want to do it. We don't think about sometimes. It just doesn't come to mind. Yeah, I'm one of the people that helped prepare the Bokamoso lunches, but it wasn't until I wrote this sermon that I thought that I should take some of that leftover food and walk over there and give it to that guy. And it just doesn't come to mind. But now everybody knows

Everybody knows. You know that there's there are homeless people over there when we have all this leftover food. A lot of times they won't take it. I know when a couple times I

bought Andrew into the church, he would automatically stop at the door. And if I invite him to come upstairs and sit in the kitchen—because clearly more likely than not he feels less than—it's awkward for him. So I invite him upstairs. I had him sit down at the table one day and there was some leftover food from the School for Christian Growth class and I sat with that guy. And he ate just like we eat and he went on about his business. But in my mind I did the right thing at that time. And I encourage you guys to do the same thing too when the opportunity arises.

Okay, so this is a little more sensitive. Racial sensitivity, although it varies from member to member, can be hurtful when that line is crossed. You know, my two recent personal attacks here does not give the church an F when it comes to racial sensitivity. It does give an F

to the people that opened their fresh mouths to me. If you want to know more come talk to me. And in parentheses, I put in my notes "I may or may not tell you." It depends because it's a personal type of thing. It's hurtful and I mean, it depends, okay?

In recovery, they tell us to practice courtesy, kindness, justice, and love in all of our affairs. And it's a challenge for me here sometimes. I'm talking about own words that I shared with you because I know that some of you will be slightly bothered by the fact that I said that there are some of us that are racially insensitive in our church community. You know, we all want to think that we all do and say the right things because I want us all to do and say the right things but that's just not how life is.

Do I think that the end of all things is at hand? I don't know.

Therefore, be serious and sober for prayers. Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a

multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another... Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies.[1Peter 4:7-11 New American Bible]

With that I say, Amen