



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***An Authentic Religion - The Feast of Martin Luther King, Jr. - 1172021***

Let me thank my friend, Dr. Danaher, and the members of Christ Church Cranbrook for inviting me on this most significant occasion. And that is to honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I also want to thank this wonderful band that was performing and the beautiful sounds that you made to make this a most enjoyable and worshipful occasion.

I would like to invite your attention to the book of Amos in the Old Testament, beginning in Amos fifth chapter beginning with verse 21 and ending with verse 24.

"I hate and despise your religious feast. I cannot stand you assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I would not accept them. Though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." Amen.

It's hard to imagine God hating anything, but there it is in the scripture. I hate and despise your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies. The people of Israel and Judah were big on worship and the worship often took the form of festivals or assemblies. The festival of Passover was one of them. That's where they commemorated God's deliverance of their ancestors from Egypt.

There was the festival of Tabernacles that celebrated Israel's resilience during 40 years in the desert, relying on manna for food and water from a rock. There were the festivals of first fruits, which celebrated God's abundant gifts. And then there were others. Israel and Judah were worshiping communities. Now that sounds good on its face, but may I offer you this truth? You can be a worshiping people and God can hate your worship. Let me repeat the text to you again.

"I hate and despise your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings, I would not accept them. Though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with your noisy songs. I would not listen to the music of your harps."

There is a kind of worship that God hates and you know what it is? That's the kind of worship that we participate in on Sunday that fails to impact our responsibility to the poor, to the oppressed, and to the disenfranchised Monday through Saturday. Amos says God hates that kind of worship. Church has to be

more about gathering on Sunday morning. It has to be more about being entertained by a great choir, a praise team or a charismatic preacher. If that's all we are about, no wonder the church is becoming irrelevant. The church is a place where we must integrate the faith we receive on Sunday with lives in the public square day after day after day.

So my brothers and sisters, our worship has to be expressed. Our worship must be tangible. People must see our faith. And so we can no longer decide that we're going to be "religious," and then that translates into being inactive Monday through Sunday. We can't be silent in the midst of injustice. We cannot be silent in the midst of injustice in our cities, in our country, and in the world. We cannot be silent.

It's interesting. I said to Dr. Danaher on just the other day that this was great timing because of what we witnessed on yesterday is a good example why we cannot be silent. When rioters attempt a coup on the government and think that that is okay. And maybe some of them were church-going and they think it's okay, as long as they worship, but we cannot be silent. Our faith has to impact the lives of people. We must be prophetic voices.

Martin Luther King said it this way. If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living shall not be in vain. So worship in and of itself is not what we ought to hold up as what makes us good, but worship that lends a hand. Worship that hates what God hates and loves what God loves. People ought to see our faith more than they can hear it.

And so maybe we need to dispel the idea that the building is the church. No, we are the church. We are the church militant, and we are that every day of the week. God hates the kind of worship that just ends up being empty rituals and noisy songs and pomp and circumstance. And that's all. And he's going to judge those churches harshly who fit that description. How do I know? Well, the text says, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

The church can do better. Yes, Israel in Amos' day worshipped, but you have to read the chapters prior to chapter five, to discover why God hated their worship. Amos chapter 4, beginning with verse 11 says you trample the poor and you force them to give you grain, which was their currency. You oppress the righteous and take bribes. And you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. There was no justice for the poor. But after all that exploitation and cruel treatment of the poor and less fortunate, they would go to church and worship God. And God said, I hate your worship.

Could there be similarities today? We cannot take the time to go to church every Sunday in Detroit and in the Detroit area and ignore the blight, the red lining, the literacy rates, the crumbling schools, the lack of jobs, and the hungry mouths and go to church and act as if those things do not exist. We put on our robes,

our suits. We give our offerings, sing our songs, take our sacrament, and that's all. And God says the same thing to us. If that's the case, I despise your religious feasts. I cannot stand your assemblies. Away with your songs. I would not listen to your organs, your pianos, your guitars, et cetera. You have failed in providing justice for my people.

The last time I checked, my friends, the Cross is vertical and horizontal. Jesus had a life extending up to God, but it also extended out to humanity. Let our lives extend out. Extend out to the poor, extend out to the oppressed, extend out to the lonely, extend out to the hurting and to the hungry, the unemployed, the underemployed, the prisoner, out to our neighborhoods, out to the world.

How can we turn it around as I close? How can we turn it around? Well, let me just give you a good example of something that happened to me a couple of years ago. I did something that was really different in regards to giving. I was on the road and I came to a toll. I paid my toll and I said to the person in the toll booth, I said, "And here's a little extra for the person in the car behind me." Now I did not know the person in the car behind me. I just simply wanted to do it as an act of kindness.

And so I paid my toll and paid that person's toll. And then I just watched as I drove off through my rear view mirror the reaction - well, what probably would have been a reaction of that person, like what? You mean to tell me that somebody in the world would do something like that? He paid my toll? And so as I drove, I noticed after he went through the toll booth, he sped up so he could see who was in that car would do something like that. And as he caught up with me, I just simply gave him the thumbs up and I gave him the thumbs up to say to him, "You know, brother, I was simply just paying it forward."

And my brothers and sisters, that's what God asks us to do. He simply asks us to pay it forward. God has been good to me. He gave me health and He gave me strength. He gave me life. He takes care of me every single day. He doesn't have to do it, but He does. It's simply His grace. And because I am a recipient of God's grace, I just simply want to pay it forward. And so that's what he's asking all of us to do as we celebrate the life and legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., He wants us to pay it forward. All the goodness and grace that we have received, we ought to pay it forward and share it with someone else.

Well, we often quote Matthew 25 that says, "Well done my good and faithful servant." Now, I believe He did not simply address this to sinners. I believe that He addressed this to religious people like me and like you, and He was saying to them, I want you to pay it forward, because then that text, you remember, the person asked, well Lord, when did you see me feed the hungry or give water to the thirsty or visit a prisoner or put clothes on a naked person? And Jesus said, well, when you did it to the least of these, when you paid it forward, you did it unto me.

And so that's what we're asked to do. We're asked to simply pay it forward. Well, somebody may be asking, well, what can I do? God didn't make me like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., what can I do? Little old me, what can I do? My contribution would be so small compared to many, let alone Dr. King. Well, don't worry about how small, just make a contribution. It's Mother Teresa who said we, ourselves, feel what we're doing is just a drop in the ocean, but the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. Add your drop.

Let us pray.

We thank you for the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And we pray that that same spirit of benevolence and giving may live on in us. May we too pay it forward because we're so grateful for grace received. In Jesus' name, amen.

[End of Recording]