

CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Morning. God bless you. You may be seated.

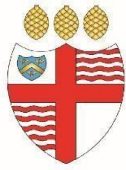
It has been a privilege and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be at the wonderful Christ Church Cranbrook. We honor Father Bill, who is a phenomena among Christianity and personally, I view him as a hero. I'm thankful for the opportunity. Pastor Manisha is special and gifted. And all of the staff and all of you, you've been great. I have one concern and I might as well tell you now that pastor Bill mentioned that he bought his wife a sweatshirt right before the Lions game and he went to sleep and they lost. So we do kind of blame you for that loss.

So I don't know what your norm is, if you have any norms during this time of the year. Some people will listen to Dr. King's sermons and read some of his quotes. But I have a book, I go to this book every year. It's a book entitled King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King Jr. It's a large book. It's filled with pictures and captions underneath about what's going on in the picture. Captions that, quite honestly, detailed distinct and dynamic and decisive, and even dark and deliberate moments in King's life and in the history of our country.

So every year around this time, I pull out the book as a way of honoring the legacy of Dr. King, lest I forget. You do know that we have a tendency to forget. So this week I did it again. I pull out the book, I'm seeking to know something more or to hear Dr. King speak to me through Holy Spirit. Seeking an audience with him, what is it that I'll learn this year, the 39th year of his death?

As I set and considered Dr. King's impact in our world, I ran across four words that pierced my heart, that begged for my attention. Words that were not unfamiliar to me, but this year they resonated more deeply than ever before. Perhaps you could call it a serendipitous moment. In this book that I mentioned, there is a picture of Rosa Parks whose refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in December, 1955 became the catalyst for the Montgomery Bus boycott. During this boycott, Blacks and other supporters refused to use the bus system, choosing instead to walk, to carpool, to ride mules, and some even reverted to horse-drawn buggies.

In this same book, I even saw a picture of an elderly sister, an older woman that kind of reminded me of my grandmother. She had a large box of turnips on her head. No transportation, no bus. And so she walks back from the market, perhaps, with the turnips on her head. And I mentioned earlier, and I don't know whether I



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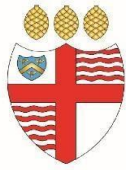
can say it now, but the Detroit Lions may have had some grit, and still we honor them, but this sister had some grit even back then. Dr. King, in his role as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, would spearhead this Montgomery Bus Boycott.

But what stood out for me as I read this book this year is that at some point, instead of using the word "boycott," Dr. King replaced it with, listen to this, "massive non-cooperation with evil." Dr. King argued that non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as cooperation with good. "Non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as cooperation with good." This principle asserts that passively accepting injustice is equivalent to supporting it. "Massive non-cooperation with evil." These words grabbed me by the throat. These words forced me to wrestle with whether the church, whether myself have been content to simply cooperate with the good and view this as good enough, Christian enough, righteous enough. Whether we have been hoodwinked into viewing cooperation with good and non-cooperating with evil as two spectrums, as opposite poles, instead of seeing them as one. Cooperating with good and non-cooperating with evil as one, as linear, as inseparable, as biblical, as duty.

Massive non-cooperation with evil is the work necessary if we will get a glimpse of the beloved community here on earth. A community that Dr. King envisioned, where we live in a world based on justice and equal opportunity and love and goodwill for all of us. For all of us, Black, White, male, female, gay, straight. For all of us. Non-cooperation with evil is a mandate to call out unjust laws, unfair economic policies, world systems, and powers in high places, with the goal being to ensure that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is no longer a dream but a reality.

It is a commitment to fight with our wallets, our votes, our voices, our feet, and yes, with love and prayer. A refusal to cooperate with evil is a refusal to comply, to collaborate, to celebrate injustice, and those who perpetrate it. It is a commitment to fight the evils of our time, including racial injustice and sexism, and homophobia, and mass deportation, and environmental degradation and gun laws that don't protect our children.

Dr. King's words "massive non-cooperation with evil" beautifully dances with the word of Jesus In Luke 4:18-19. You know the words: "The spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. To set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."



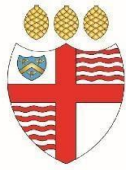
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In our Exodus lectionary reading today, the Israelites are suffering oppression, as it were, at the hands of the Egyptians. They have been sojourners for 430 years. It is not known how long during that time that they were actually slaves. But one can see this whole theme of non-cooperation with evil resonating within this text. The question for me isn't whether opposing and fighting against evil is righteous work, because it is. The question that's booming in my soul is who are the massives? Who comprises the massive? Who works in the work of massive non-cooperation with evil? Well, where is the crowd, the people who will take up the work to respond to current evils and the injustices that Dr. King alluded to?

In our reading today, we see God's response to the suffering of God's people and subsequently God's commitment to confront evil. God is a part of the massive, isn't that great news? Jesus Christ is a part of the massive. God called Moses, as he did King, into the work of the massive. Bonhoeffer and Sojourner Truth and others were also a part of the massive. And today I invite you and I, all of us into the ring. I can't be in the ring by myself. All of us must get in the ring to wrestle with God's calling to be a part of the massive. To wrestle sweetly and tearfully and painfully and maybe walk away like Job with a proverbial limp, but also with a blessing of a renewed passion to become a member of the massive, those who dare confront evil.

If the church isn't part of the massive, then how are we called the followers of Christ? Being a part of the massive will require some things from us. It will require that we address the selective deafness and blindness that is within all of us, the selective deafness and blindness that exists within all of us. I said earlier, I'm not married, I don't have children. But my friends tell me that when you have a spouse and when you have children, they pretend like they don't see stuff in the house. They'll pretend like they don't hear you when you call them a thousand times. Selective deafness and blindness can be dangerous and deadly.

In Exodus 3:7, we read as God told Moses, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I've heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering." And again, in verse nine, God reiterates that I've seen it. I'm sick of it. I can't take it no more. Being a part of the massive will require that we take off the blinders and that we remove the AirPods from our ears. I recall a friend of mine saying, you know, it's one thing to be passing by and see that homeless brother or sister standing on the corner asking for something. You can just drive right on past them. But he says, but when you're stuck at a light and there they are, you are forced to see their face. You're forced to sit with them. You can no longer act as if you don't see them.



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It has rightfully been said that hearing is a form of touch. And I said earlier, as I say today, that for families, for spouses maybe we need to be reminded not just in the vein of my sermon, but all of our relationships, that hearing is a form of touch. Dr. King warned to ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it. One of the most beautiful acts of love and non-cooperation with evil starts when we hear the cries of others and don't act like we can't hear or that we can't see. That's easy work.

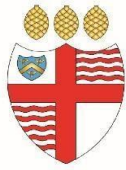
Reverend Rick Morley offered that we are called to look more closely, listen more intently, and search out the nooks and crannies of the world around us and hear the cry of the people that we might not normally hear. Have you heard some crying lately? I was born in a little town called Orrville, Alabama. It's about 15 miles northeast of Selma. Selma, which is where the infamous Edmund Pettus Bridge lurked with memories of Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965. Memories of Turnaround Tuesday, March 9, 1965 that was led by Dr. King himself.

One of my most painful moments growing up in Alabama happened in the ditch. I was playing touch football with the boys, four of us, two on each side. I was thrown the ball. I caught it, and I began to run toward the goal. I felt kind of like Jahmyr Gibbs perhaps. The other team pursued me, and instead of a touch, since we were playing touch football, I wasn't touched, I was forcibly pushed and ended up landing in some broken glass.

On that day, I could only cry out in fear as I saw the blood streaming down and the whites of my bone sticking out. I saw fright in the faces of my playmates, and I was afraid, and I cried out the more, surely that was it. Surely I would die. Surely the pains of being in Egypt have gotten me this time. But my grandmother was in the house, and she heard my cry and she came running out to see what was going on. She took charge and got the necessary ointments and bandages on my wounds. On that day that I was sure that I would die, somebody heard me cry.

My grandmother is long gone now but it is not lost on me that we live in a world where people are still crying in ditches, that people that thought they were playing touch football got pushed too hard. Crying because of the bondages of hatred and violence and sexism and racism. Crying from the bondages of addiction, broken hearts, and loneliness. Professor David Augsburger said that being heard is so close to being loved, that for the average person you can't distinguish.

It will require that we take off the blinders. And that we unplug our ears. Being a part of the massive will also require that you and I confront our belief systems



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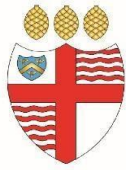
about who we think should get the milk and the honey. I'm doing my best y'all to stay away from politics. I'm doing my best not to mention one side or the other, but can I just use the warning of President Biden the other day about the US becoming an oligarchy? He threatened that democracy, that basic rights, that freedoms were at stake. An oligarchy is a form of government where power is concentrated in the hands of a few, a small, elite, wealthy group. Basically, it's about the difference between the haves way up here and the have-nots make up the rest.

We don't have to agree with President Biden, but we must do the internal work and ask what we really believe. Is the Promised Land racist? Is the Promised Land sexist? Is the Promised Land homophobic? Is the Promised Land only for Blacks or only for Whites, or only for Hispanics, only for the rich, or only for the famous, or is there room for all in the Promised Land?

God said to Moses, "I've heard them and I need them to know that I've come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a spacious place, one flowing with milk and honey." Moses is called to confront Pharaoh and to lead the people out of Egypt as an act of active resistance to non-cooperation. Perhaps we must see for the sake of this sermon, the mention of the Hittites and Amorites and the Perizzites, and the Hivites and Jebusites as symbolisms of evil that must be confronted in the Promised Land so that everybody can get in.

Say what you want, God does indeed have a sense of humor. God hears their cries, sees their oppression, has a promised place for them that will require the eviction of the evil that currently exists. And then God does something that made me laugh out loud. Has God ever made anyone here laugh? God in this text changes the pronouns. Yeah, things are great as long as God was saying, I've heard, I've observed, I know, I've come down. Having this conversation with Moses and all of these I's, but then in verse 10, God shifts and says to Moses, "So come I will send – uh-oh – you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." I-I-I-I, you. Moses was vibing with God until the pronouns changed from I to you. We will pray and we will rally behind others but being a part of the massive will always start when the confrontation, where the pronouns change, where the work shifts from God to us, where our comfort is challenged, our religion is called out, and our prejudices that we all have are confronted.

God doesn't simply acknowledge the injustices, but God commissions Moses, Dr. King, and countless others to confront it directly. Like them, y'all, we as a church,



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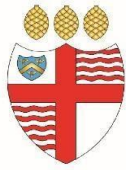
me and you are called to confront the systemic injustices, but we got to confront who we think should have access to the milk and to the honey, and dare I say, the expensive eggs.

Moses, tag you are it. Dr. King's concept of the Promised Land symbolized a vision of a world where all people, regardless of race, would have milk and honey, the milk and honey of equal opportunities and rights. This is deeper than just giving them milk and honey, which is sometimes needful, but it is about working to ensure that everybody has equal access to get some milk and some honey.

Dr. King's use of the exodus narrative in his speeches and writings was intentional because he saw himself as a kind of modern day Moses, fighting for the people against suppression and fighting for them to get to the Promised Land. Ironically, King didn't get to see his envisioned Promised Land. Moses didn't get in. But can I just tell you that when we do the work of non-cooperation with evil, that there is a satisfaction of peace, a fulfilling of purpose that is content to look over and say, I've seen the Promised Land though they've never stepped a foot in it. That when we're on purpose, we can lay down at night. That when we're on purpose, we can breathe our last breath, maybe having never seen the promise that we work for, but somehow we'll be able to say, spiritually, I've seen the Promised Land.

Being a part of the massive, y'all, is work. Finally, being a part of the massive will often lead us to the question of "who am I?" After God called Moses to give him the task of confronting the evils of injustices so that he can get the Israelites to the Promised Land, Moses has a meltdown. I've had some meltdowns. I started a church in the pandemic, y'all. I've had some meltdowns. Moses, God is doing all the talking. Verses 7 through 10, God's just talking. Moses, this, da-da-da-da-da. But now Moses gets to respond to all that God just shared with him. His response is in the form of a question, like Jeopardy. No, no, no, no. You are not responsible for the answer, but what's the question? The question for Moses is who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? And y'all, I got to tell you that I love Moses' response because some of us would've said, do you know who I am? But Moses says to God, who am I?

I'm not smart like him. I'm not gifted like her. I can't write that book to help people. I know I got an idea. I've been talking about selling a company to help employ people, but I don't feel adequate. I don't feel adequate to move from the life that I know to a life that will surely cost me something. I'm going to stay right here because, who am I that I should be great? Who am I that I should speak truth



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to power? Who am I? I can't speak up about that. What would my family and friends say?

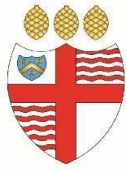
It is true that the work of confronting evil is a daunting task and who am I, is a real response. I've asked it with various assignments that God led me to. Surely just a little country girl from Alabama that had problems speaking just like Moses, that's in a world calling myself a, a preacher/pastor in a sexist world. Who am I, I said to God. Moses says, you just go. You just show up. You just give me your yes, even though you feel inadequate, even though you've made some mistakes, even though your pedigree isn't that impressive, even though I know your secret sin, I will be with you, Moses.

I'm not going to necessarily answer who am I? But can I just tell you this? Can I give you a promise that I will be with you, that you would never be alone in the work that I've called you to, that when you get despondent and feel like you can't go on, I will be with you. My will, my bill, my way, my pay. And Moses, on those days, when you feel like Dr. King in his letter from a Birmingham jail, remember, I'm here. And to prove it, Moses, this is a sign that when you have brought the people up out of Egypt, you will learn how to worship me on the mountain.

The mountain mention refers to Mount Sinai where Moses would later receive the 10 Commandments. Mount Sinai symbolizes a sacred place where Moses and the Israelites will worship God and enter into a covenant relationship with God. Moses, this is bigger than you. I'm calling my people into relationship. I'm laying down the law for my people. I'm laying and establishing a way by which you can worship me. I'm going to make you love me up on the mountain top.

May we, like Moses, may we, like Dr. King, answer God's call to be massive agents of change, forever working toward the realization of the beloved community on earth. Maybe we weren't called to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land like Moses, or to fight national racial injustices like Dr. King, or to give up our lives on a cross like Jesus, our Christ. But be sure that we've been called, that we've been called to not cooperate with evil.

"I have a dream," Dr. King said, "that one day every valley will be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." He ends as I will end. I don't know what will happen now. Regardless of what size of the political spectrum you're on, I don't know and you don't know what will happen now. Like King said, we've got some



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difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now because I've been to the mountaintop and I don't mind. Like anybody else, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain, and I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight.

I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," because I did the work. I did not back down. I did not cooperate with evil. And even though I may not see the Promised Land, I'm living it because my legacy is one that refuses to cooperate with evil. I only wish that we would take up the call, but I also only wish that the Lions had not cooperated with evil last night.

God bless you all.