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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Second Sunday of Easter |
| Year B RCL |

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

Psalm 133

**MLK, Jr. (feast day 4-04)**

Almighty God, by the hand of Moses your servant you led your people out of slavery, and made them free at last: Grant that your Church, following the example of your prophet Martin Luther King, may resist oppression in the name of your love, and may secure for all your children the blessed liberty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns wtih you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

**The Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 4:32-35**

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

**The Response**

**Psalm 133**

***Ecce, quam bonum!***

1 Oh, how good and pleasant it is, \*  
when brethren live together in unity!

2 It is like fine oil upon the head \*  
that runs down upon the beard,

3 Upon the beard of Aaron, \*  
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.

4 It is like the dew of Hermon \*  
that falls upon the hills of Zion.

5 For there the Lord has ordained the blessing: \*  
life for evermore.

**The Epistle**

**1 John 1:1-2:2**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

**The Gospel**

**John 20:19-31**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

We have all doubted, we have all fallen short. I could preach a sermon on the infamous, if perhaps misnamed, Doubting Thomas, but actually I don’t want to do so because we would miss some of the joys of the other passages, and I want to say a few words about hope and justice instead.

As many of you may know, this past Wednesday was the 50th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. What surprised me most were not the words of Jesse Jackson, or our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, or even seeing my friend, the Rev. Paula Clark, an African American woman priest Canon on the Bishop of Washington’s staff on the jumbo-thon television on the mall, bigger than life…what made me smile was an article I read that documented Bernice, a daughter of King sharing her view that the United States, 50 years after the death of her father is “Awoke.”

Awoke does not mean complete, healed or reconciled, but it does mean aware and intentional. Woke or awoke is kind of a trendy phrase that encompasses being in tune to human rights, being aware of the suppression of the marginalized…

There was also another article I read that posited that one of the phrases attributed to King is perhaps in need of tweaking. That phrase, which is a favorite of many, is “The arc of the moral universe is long, but bends towards justice.” The author of the piece I was reading, Chris Hayes, felt that it should more accurately state that “nothing bends towards justice without us bending it.” There is a lot of truth to that.

I put forth that both statements are right. The country is “awoke,” maybe in a push-pull fashion, 3 steps forward, 2 steps back *AND* the country is trying to bend the moral arc towards justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr, as Cornel West wrote for the anniversary of his death, was a radical and we should not sterilize his legacy. As West knows quite well, King was also profoundly Christian and was doing his best to live out the Gospel, which I would phathom that is what made him a radical. Now King was not perfect; he was not sinless and I’m sure I don’t need to state—- he was not Christ. (Indeed, we learned later he was a bit of a womanizer.)

Still.. John Lewis, senator and civil rights leader, this week wrote, “I’ve always held the belief that what he (Martin Luther King) left us- the way of hope, the way of peace, the way of love, a philosophy and discipline rooted in nonviolence cannot be taken away. These things are eternal. His message is as important now as it was 50 years ago.” I also probably don’t need to re-state, but King ***was*** Christian. It is Christ who ***first*** taught us about the way of hope, the way of peace, the way of love, a philosophy and discipline rooted in nonviolence. There is good reason why we honor King, why the Episcopal church and other churches devote the day April 4th, every year to remembering him.

King was able to act because he took the Gospel teaching seriously.

The Gospel this week, yes, it has Doubting Thomas, but it also has Jesus sending forth his disciples to become apostles. “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

You could almost hear him saying as well—-What are you doing here locked behind the door out of fear? You can’t live, truly live as the light of Christ would have you do; you can’t truly live if you are in fear. You can’t spread the light of Christ this way. And the only way to not live in fear is to forgive the sins of others.

If you forgive others and operate as if the other is living in Christ too, you might actually reconcile; there is the potential to reconcile. There were plenty white Christian leaders who were, but not all were against King. Although many thought he was too vocal, demanding too much too fast, King operated as if these white Christian leaders cared, as if they were looking out for the other, looking out for their African American sisters and brothers. He called on them to not fear and to join his work for justice.

King notoriously often said, “I would rather be dead than afraid.” He embraced living in Christ. He forgave the sins of others.

In order to forgive others and not live in fear, you have to know that you are forgiven by God. You have to know that you too have sinned, confess your sin, and know that HE who is faithful and just will forgive you/ he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I am wrong and sinful and you too are wrong and sinful. I must not fear you and you must not fear me. In his name, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ… let us be awoke, let us work for justice, let us do some bending of the moral arc of the universe. Let us walk the way of hope, the way of peace, the way of love, a philosophy and discipline rooted in nonviolence, which Christ first taught us to do.