

If I'm being honest, as I've gotten older and as I've done more conscientious reading about his life, I've found myself nervous, and if anything, frustrated by Martin Luther King, Jr., Day. Let me be explicitly clear here, not because of him, because let's be real if there is any human being deserving of a day of honor, respect, and memorial, it's him. No, I find myself frustrated with what ends up being the watered down, rose-colored glasses treatment of his legacy that tends to get trotted out every third Monday in January. Tomorrow will find social media feeds strewn about with pull quotes and images from the March on Washington or the "I Have a Dream" speech.

In particular, there will most likely be fingers pointed to his commitment to non-violence and peaceful protest, using him as a benchmark, a calling card for how we are supposed to approach the world we live in, and the frustrating thing about so much of this is that so much of it tends to come from non-people of color, who want to look good or sound good, but at the end of the day, also aren't interested in doing a deep dive into the full reality of MLK's life, what he truly called people to do, how he called them to live, and the fact that non-violence is not a call to non-action. If we let ourselves fully digest and embrace the life of MLK I think there would probably be a lot less Facebook posts, because people would probably

just be a smidge uncomfortable, and we just can't have discomfort on social media, especially not for the majority population.

I truly started taking all of this in, when a seminary professor had us do a deep dive, a real gut-check look at *A Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. For so long this has been held up as one of King's most illustrious works, and it will be rampant on social media tomorrow, but here are some quotes that I doubt will make the cut.

"I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

"We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people."

"For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

For non-people of color, tomorrow is not a day to make us look good with whatever glossy picture we can post, what words we can quote. It should be a day to step back and consider how his words still ring true to us, who sit in complacency, or who have dared to continue to utter the words “wait” because there must be a “better time” for justice work but certainly that time is not now because, well, there are other things we need to do first.

As a self-professed procrastinator with anxiety, there is no word more appealing to me than wait. You have some big, scary thing to do? Do it as far out on the calendar as possible. You have that annoying, small thing you have been avoiding doing? Keep avoiding it until the last possible minute. You hate flying so don't want to think about doing it? Don't pack until the very last moment the night before you leave. I can't explain it, it's just how my brain works. Sometimes waiting is the thing our brains just convinces us that we need, even if it isn't what's good for us. And thank goodness there are people in our lives who refuse to let us give into the just wait mindset and tell us, schedule the thing, do the thing, just pack your clothes already! And well, I will admit, I take some comfort in knowing, thanks to our gospel, that Jesus sometimes needed those moments too.

We jump to John for a hot second to kick off this season after Epiphany, the season of the church year that we spend asking the question:

who is Jesus? Every week a different layer gets peeled back, another facet of who our Savior is is revealed so that when we get to Lent, we feel prepared to follow in his footsteps. We know who it is that we are going to be following, because we've spent the intentional time figuring it out. And what we learn this week is that Jesus is just like us: he knows when push comes to shove you have to listen to your mother.

Jesus, Mary, and the disciples find themselves at a wedding where, for the host, the unthinkable happens. They run out of wine. A Jewish wedding in Jesus' time would have been a multi-day affair and so to run out of wine so quickly would have been a deep mark of shame to the hosts, and when you live in a society centered around honor and shame, this is a huge problem. Mary approaches Jesus and presents him with the problem, and he basically says, yeah so? This isn't our problem. And yet beneath this façade of casual dismissal, Jesus knows what this is...a nudge. He tells her that his time has not yet come, and yet, Mary still leaves the challenge hanging.

Mary leaves the question unspoken, what if it is time?

There are so many things to consider here, about *why* Jesus is saying it isn't time. Maybe he feels like whatever ends up being his grand entrance onto the Messiah stage needs to be something *big*, a healing, a feeding, something for lots of people to see, and is providing some wine at a wedding

really the first step you want to put forward? Maybe he wants just a little more time to get to know the disciples, hang out with his friends before they become his friends *and* followers? Maybe Jesus also feels that when the big, scary thing is on the horizon the safest route is pushing it as far down the road as possible? Because Jesus knows how this plays out, right? Once he sets foot on this path, there is no turning around. Once this stone starts rolling downhill there is no stopping it. He does this and the timer starts ticking away towards the crucifixion. So maybe he's just not ready. And yet, there is Mary...you are ready, there is no time like the present, no matter how nervous you are...it's time to start...it's time to stop waiting...

There are so many aspects of our faith lives where we could see this playing out, but there is no clearer example than when it comes to the relationship between our faith and our pursuit, or lack thereof, of justice. Even 60+ years later, the *Letter from the Birmingham Jail* ring out with a crystal clear demand for us to listen. We are far too well acquainted with the word *wait*. Wait until things calm down. Wait until the dust settles and emotions aren't so high. Wait until people are more comfortable. Wait until we get the economy figured out. Then we can talk about justice and human rights and equity for all people. And honestly sometimes it's shocking if we even say the word wait because more often than not we are a part of the

appalling silence of good people. We think, kind of like Jesus looking at a bunch of jars of water, if it's nothing something *big* then why do it? We think our little step toward justice isn't that big of a deal in the grand scheme of things so why bother. And yet, little things, like wearing a Pride pin, speaking up when a family member makes a racist joke, add up to big things. Maybe some of us think, what's the big deal with becoming an RIC congregation? Isn't it enough to say we're welcoming and inclusive? But to the person seeking a safe space? Something as small as *seeing* a sign of welcome, seeing those pins, having it be a core identity is massive and it ceases to be "justice work" that works in silence, but does it out loud.

And frankly often we sound like the gospel, what is this to you or me? How does racial equality, women's reproductive rights, or LGBTQIA+ rights have to do with me? It has to do with you because you are human and your siblings are human, because you are a child of God and your siblings are children of God. It has to do with you because injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. All of these things, saying wait, remaining silent, thinking we can't make a difference or that it doesn't impact us are all simply excuses to remain complacent and keep the world a comfortable place for *us*, with zero consideration for our siblings for whom the world is anything but comfortable.

The really amazing thing about the gospel is that no one knew Jesus did it. All of the glory, all of the praise went to the host, to the person that Jesus helped avoid shame and dishonor, without a worry for if Jesus got acknowledgement. And isn't that the heart of justice work? It's not about us! And we would so much rather it would be. Wouldn't justice work be easier if we did it in a way that made all the cis-het white folks comfortable? Yeah, it'd be easier, but it wouldn't be justice, because y'all it is not about us. It is about our siblings and the fact that it is time that we stop telling them to just hang tight and wait until *we're* ready.

It takes bravery and courage to stop procrastinating, stop avoiding, stop finding the excuse and simply just start doing it, doing the work, putting feet to our faith and actually getting stuff done. Faith in action doesn't just look like showing up, singing some hymns, and saying the same prayers. Faith in action is feeding the hungry, freeing the oppressed, and saying the waiting is over for all to be free, for all to be safe, for all to be known. There is a small jug of water in each of our lives, a small jug that we often ignore because of so many reasons, but it's time to stop ignoring it, stop waiting around, and finally be about the business of turning that water into wine, turning that silence into speech, turning oppression into justice. It is time to say what is this to me? It is everything. **AMEN!!!**