

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Very Rev. Dr. Michael Battle Transcript**

"Dr. King's Vision of a Beloved Community"

"There is something about love that builds up, that is creative. There is something about hate that tears down, that is destructive. So King concludes: 'love your enemies.'"

"Remembering is essential to Christianity," preaches the Very Rev. Dr. Michael Battle at our Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday service, so much so that even Jesus "has to command us to remember correctly" during the Last Supper.

Today, as we remember the 39 year discipleship of Dr. King, Father Michael invites us to remember King's theology of "the beloved community" where heaven is about universal, not simply personal, salvation and where we see all people—especially our enemies— as children of God, deserving of redemption. Watch his sermon. The readings are Exodus 3: 7-12, Psalm 77: 11-20, 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11, and Luke 6: 27-36.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the great migration, historians say between 1915 and the early 1970s an interesting occurrence happened where rural African Americans in the South, thousands, millions, they say around 10 million, migrated to the Northeast, to the Midwest, and to the West. One of the main habits was that they would, in the families send the children back to the grandparents in the South growing up. These urban environments, many of the parents were seeing that their children were being influenced negatively. They would send their children who were growing up in urban environments back to the rural South and little Johnny was no exception. Little Johnny was told by his grandmother that the pastor was coming the following Sunday and he needed to be ready. What's your name? Johnny Jones. How old are you? Six years old. Where do bad boys go? They go to ****. Good. Good Johnny. The grandmother said and remember, don't talk too much. During the week the grandmother wanted to make sure that Johnny was ready for the pastor to come for the Sunday meal, it was around Wednesday and the grandmother pulled little Johnny over. What's your name? I'm Johnny Jones. How old are you? I'm six years old. Where do bad boys go? They go to Hell. Good Johnny, the grandmother said and remember, don't talk too much.

The big day, Sunday the grandmother was trying to get Johnny ready and his Sunday best go to meeting attire and as Johnny was putting on his white shoes, the grandmother rehearsed, what's your name? Johnny Jones. How old are you? I'm six years old. Where do bad boys go? They'd go to Hell. Good Johnny. Remember, don't talk too much. After church, the pastor comes over. He goes in the door and he says Mrs. Jones, it's good to see you. What a nice boy you have here as the pastor returns. What's

your name? My name is Johnny Jones. I'm six years old. Go to Hell and don't talk too much. Remembering is hard especially when we are anxious. Our anxieties can take over our memory. If we're not careful, we only live in a short-term memory. Our anxieties can make us forget events completely. Or our anxieties can become like Medusa and turn our past into stone. Remembering is essential to Christianity because we're called to remember a person. Jesus is the person. But Jesus even knew our anxieties and as we are about to hear in the sacraments, Jesus will say to us, command us, do this in remembrance of me. Jesus even knows our anxieties and Jesus even knows. It has to command us to remember correctly. Not only are we called to remember a person, we're called to remember persons. But in our anxieties we often forget them. One such person today we are called to remember is Martin Luther King Jr., a person that has been the enemy of so many. We are called to remember the succession of Jesus's disciples and Martin Luther King Jr. certainly was Jesus's disciple.

But for some reason, again just like Medusa, we want to put 12 disciples and stone and that's it. But Martin Luther King Jr. was one of Jesus's great disciples as well. And believe it or not you are Jesus's disciple. In as much as you remember me, Jesus says, do this and doing those things that Jesus commands, like loving our enemies, doing good to those whom wishes harm. Someone asks for a coat. Give them two. When we do those things, we are remembering the succession of being one of Jesus's disciples. I wonder how would we, as Jesus's disciples, do any better than little Johnny's responses. What's your name? Johnny knew his own name but he had difficulty remembering others. Remembering their name. A name is not just nomenclature of someone naming you after a loved one or picking a nice name that you hope someone will call you by. Naming in the biblical sense is knowing who you are. Calling you by who you are. Jesus was named a voice from heaven said you are my beloved Son. Jesus's name from heaven wasn't Jesus. The voice from heaven named Jesus 'beloved son.' The wonderful theology about that is Jesus understands that we also have the same name: 'beloved child of God.' I think that's why Martin Luther King Jr. loved the concept of beloved child of God as he named his own theology "The Beloved Community." But in this process of naming that God does we don't like it very much because we may know our own names.

We may know the names of our loved ones, but we do not know the names of our enemies. We certainly wouldn't know our enemy as a beloved child of God in our reptilian brain when that kicks in that someone threatens us, persecutes us, wishes us harm there is no way in **** is that person, a beloved child of God. But Jesus teaches us to practice baby steps knowing our enemies as a child of God. Re-learning the name of those who wishes harm, renaming those who are not like us, through the commonality of a beloved community, to the commonality of how God names us. your name? It's not simply Michael or Joyce. Our real name in Christianity, in our Christian faith is beloved child of God. And we cannot live in echo chambers of thinking that only some are beloved. God loves the world. He gave His only son for the world, His beloved son. What's your name? It's really beloved child of God. That's how I would answer the grandmother. How old are you? Well, that's another thing. In our theology as Anglicans we carry what I think is a blessing, some think a curse, we carry at least two traditions in Christianity. In Anglicanism we carry this identity of being both Protestant and Catholic. Our Protestant genes are problematic around this question of how old? Not just chronological age I'm thinking, but the kind of old soul, the kind of wisdom, the kind of maturity, that kind of old. How old are you? The Protestant side we've learned correctly that we're saved by grace. But we think grace is self sufficient that we do not have to grow.

Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, they are all about growth. But for us we play a baseball spirituality. If we touch home plate, if we know that everything is grace, we're safe. But we tend not to enter into this deeper Christian spirituality of growth, maturing in our faith. I think for Martin Luther King Jr., he is

an example of maturity. He yesterday would have been 93 years old. Just think about that. He technically could still be living right now. He was assassinated when he was 39 years old. But in our memory in order to get a federal holiday in the name of Martin Luther King Jr. According to our own culture wars that still are just as existent today, in our memories we tend to forget how old Martin Luther King really was. He led that movement through 39 years and he had this deep wisdom to say the right thing at the right time. He also understood Jesus and our gospel lesson today as King writes, if one loves an individual merely on the account of friendliness, that person loves for the sake of the benefits to be gained from that friendship rather than for the friend's own sake. Consequently, the best way to assure oneself that love is impartial is to have love for the enemy from whom you can expect no good in return, but only hostility and persecution. That's love you see. It is redemptive. This is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up. There's something about love that is creative. There is something about hate that tears down. There is something about hate that is destructive. So King concludes, love your enemies. The last question for us to answer for the grandmother is where do bad boys go? I grew up in North Carolina and the common question, which I think is a similar question to where do bad boys go, the common question was, did I have a personal relationship with Jesus? And on the surface there was a benign intent.

They were trying to see about my relationship with God. But the negative intent was that it exposed the echo chambers of who is in Hell and who is in Heaven. Usually I could tell by the person asking me that question that they had a picture of who was in Heaven and who was in Hell. And usually it looked like if that person who was speaking was a Democrat, Heaven was full of Democrats and Hell was all Republicans. If that person was white, that person tended to understand the language of Heaven. The first seat in Heaven to be those of European descent. The best theologians are European. The best music is European. And those in Hell tended to be the less sophisticated. I learned that this question of where do bad boys go it points to a very short attention span for how God works in this world. I wrote a book in 2017 called Heaven on Earth in which I looked at Martin Luther King Jr. and Archbishop Desmond Tutu's vision of Heaven. And what both of them agreed on was Heaven wasn't simply about personal salvation. Heaven was about universal salvation. How could you be in Heaven aware that someone was in Hell? How could you still be happy knowing someone was suffering, and weeping, and gnashing their teeth forever? How could you still be in Heaven conscious of people in Hell? It makes no sense. Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King Jr. help us, as we know, where bad boys go. They help us to re-imagine these echo chambers that we live in and which being a beloved child of God transcends our fixtures, transcends our saints made in stone. Being a beloved child of God lessens our anxieties and creates a deeper memory, a deeper way of seeing each other actually so that even our enemies we have learned to calm our minds and to see through the hostility a child of God. And now that I know that Archbishop Tutu is in Heaven, I'm sure that his request that there be rum and raisin ice cream there. I'm sure that that request is being met. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of The Holy Spirit.

Amen.