

*The Congregational Church of Hollis, NH, UCC*  
*Rev Bob Macfarlane, Interim Minister*

*Sermon, Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, January 10, 2014*

***“Bending Toward Justice”***

*Luke 4: 1 - 14*

We've all seen the speech a thousand times. We've all seen the documentaries of Bull Connor and his water hoses. We all understand that everyone, no matter the color of their skin, should be equally welcome at the lunch counter at Woolworths, and the voting booth in hometown America. We've seen it all, and we get it!

Yet it is still important, if not for ourselves, then for the next generation, to re-up for freedom, to re-up for justice, to re-up for respect, to re-up for love. *“I have a dream,”* someone said 50 years ago, *“that ONE DAY...”* One day! And because that day has not yet come fully in this country, or any country, we need to revisit often, the reasons why the movement for civil rights was needed in the first place.

That's why it was important to bring our Confirmation Class last evening to the Martin Luther King Jr Celebration in Nashua - ten of us from this Hollis Church attended, youth and adults together - and except for the various wonderful invited Choirs performing - we may have been the single largest contingent from any particular Church! We needed to sing the freedom songs once again, we needed to hear the words of inspiration, we needed to “let freedom ring” once more.

It has been said, often and in many ways, that we stand upon the shoulders of those who have gone before us. We know that instinctively, as we think of the simple gifts of life and love each of us has been given, by our parents and grandparents over the early years of our maturing. Personally speaking, I know that my pastoral temperament comes from my mother, and my predisposition for fairness and justice comes from my father. I know right well, that I stand upon the shoulders of my own folks, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

It was James (Arthur) Baldwin who said, *“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”* Now that's just fine, as long as our own children can discriminate between the “good, the bad, and the ugly” of our personalities! And as we grow and mature, as we head to high school or college, the world opens up to us, and our role models widen. After the Boston Braves moved out of Boston, my National League team became the St. Louis Cardinals, primarily because of one man, the ultimate gentleman of baseball, Stan the Man Musial. Our family has sat in Bush Stadium numerous times, and our kids have had their picture taken by Musial's statue more than once. Today, I watch Alex Rodrigues on the news, and wonder, where are today's Stan Musials?

So it is that each of us focuses upon personalities which help us to grow into who we are. So Stan Musial stood upon the shoulders of Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. George Washington stood upon the shoulders of the Minutemen of Lexington and Concord. Jefferson upon the writings of Locke. The Greatest Generation of WWII upon the dough boys of WWI. Dr. King stood upon the shoulders of Mahatma Gandhi and Howard Thurman, and Henry David Thoreau, and Barack Obama upon the shoulders of the likes of Frederick Douglass, Washington Carver and King, Jr. himself.

We know that Jesus stood upon the shoulders of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the disciples, both in Jesus' time, and now in our time as well, stand upon the shoulders of Jesus Christ himself!

How true it is that none of us is an island unto ourselves. We are the product of the shared mysteries, the mutual hopes, and the dreams, of those who have gone before us. You can be proud that THIS church in Hollis has a storied history upon which to build your future. You have to go no further, than the wall in your nearby Chapel, to see pictures of some of the leadership of this congregation who have gone before you, since Pioneer Peter Powers and the first Search Committee, Called The Reverend Mr. Daniel Emerson to be its first Pastor in 1743, and who grew this church into what it is today, through a labor of love, for the next 58 years. A Saint of the Church if ever there was one.

Yes, THESE are the ones upon whose shoulders we live and breathe and have our being. So it is that THIS church stands upon the shoulders of the men and women who in THEIR day practiced what today we call “Extravagant Welcome,” to newcomers and strangers alike, to retired folk looking for a place to enjoy the fruits of their labors, to families seeking excellent schools for their children, and for faithful people of God searching for a spiritual home.

Some of you know the story of how, for a number of years, I would bring my Confirmation Classes each year on a spiritual retreat to Washington DC, to experience the Holocaust Museum, and worship at the National Cathedral. We also visited the monuments of course, and the lessons received at each one. Most especially, our youth would visit the Lincoln Memorial, and I'd have them stand, each one individually, at the exact spot where King delivered his “I Have A Dream” speech. Perhaps some of you yourselves have stood on that spot! Each confirmand read a portion of that speech out loud, so that passersby would hear, and pause for a moment. It was an especially poignant occasion for each youth.

Our Scripture this morning brings us to the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Luke, as Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. He had gone out into that desolate land all by himself, following his baptism by John. For forty days and forty nights, he wrestled with God as to what his mission and ministry might now be. God was giving him his “marching orders” so to speak, and he needed to get his temptations to be “merely a man” behind him. And you know the story.

But we all have demons to wrestle with. None of us is immune, not even Jesus in his day. And one of the greatest, one of the toughest, demons to rid ourselves of, is the fear of death. I have NO DOUBT that Jesus knew that the Cross was at the end of the road. We all know the difficult dreams Abraham Lincoln had, knowing he was a marked man since the beginning of the Civil War. And King himself said in his last preaching the night before he was assassinated, *“I fear no man. I have been to the mountain top..... I believe that I shall see the glory of the Lord.”*

St John writes of Jesus' words: *“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. Let not your hearts be troubled, and neither let them be afraid.”* Remember that LOVE casts out fear. If men were traumatized and frozen by fear, there would have been no Lexington and Concord, no Bunker Hill, no Alamo, no speaker of national fame like Frederick Douglass from the pulpits of our nation. If you were traumatized by fear, you would not be undertaking a nation search for the very best Pastor you can find. But love DOES cast out fear, especially when hearts and minds are united in a worthy goal, a goal of a spiritual future for our children, a goal of deeper faith for the entire community, a goal of having strong shoulders for those who come after us to stand upon.

Douglass himself said, ***“It is easier to build strong children, than to repair broken men.”*** Of course, he was speaking of slave children at the time, but it applies to each and every family in America today. And it was Dr. King, who in speaking of his dream, said, ***“I'm convinced that we shall overcome, because the arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”*** That is MY prayer, and I hope, it is yours as well. Let us now symbolically link arms with those in Birmingham, Alabama, San Antonio, Texas, and San Francisco, California, as we sing ***“We Shall Overcome, someday.”*** Amen.