

# Martin Luther King Jr. teaches us important lessons

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.

The organist of our church, Dr. Ralph Simpson, was the organist for Dexter Avenue Baptist Church while Dr. Martin Luther King was minister. Events I read about as history, he lived as life.

M.L. King was a friend as well as his minister. Listening to Ralph makes events more spontaneous. Like the night Dr. King's house was bombed. It was a Monday night January 29, 1956. It's impossible for me to imagine the outrage, the shock and fear that hit the black community that night.

People poured out of their houses and Dexter Avenue Church where M.L. King had been preaching at the time of the bombing. Several hundred people surrounded his house, many talking revenge.

He appeared on the porch and spoke to the crowd. From a historic perspective this speech is not remembered like the "I Have a Dream" speech. Nor does it compare to the rhythmic cadence and brilliance of his sermons. But these words did not come from a script. They were not written in the silence of a church study or tranquility of a winter evening. In the intensity of the moment, these words expressed what was really in his heart and in his mind. Perhaps he was talking to himself as well as to the crowd.

"Don't get panicky. Don't do anything panicky. Don't get your weapons. If you have weapons, take them home. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. Remember that is what Jesus said. We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love."

This speech of his is deeply moving to me. It reminds me when Jesus was on the cross and foremost in his mind was praying for his enemies, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

I pray that when attacked verbally or physically to have the spiritual sense to respond with Godliness. I pray to have the dignity that comes of walking with God. I pray to not be impressed by the intensity of another's hatred or ignorance or violence. I pray to be a woman of God as M.L. King was a man of God.

In one sense, we are each a minority. Doesn't it seem that you are surrounded by people who have different values, conflicting motives, selfish actions? When you are struggling to do right and be good, does it seem that you are outnumbered or stand out uncomfortably in the crowd? Are you attacked for being moral? Are you persecuted for not drinking, smoking or doing drugs? Can we respond in the heat of a moment with as much poise, dignity and forgiveness as Dr. King?

Jesus teaches us how to withstand the pressure of standing alone. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:44,45)

As we do this our thoughts and words will diffuse an angry crowd. Our actions will inspire respect. The fearful will gain courage. The self-righteous will find humility. And we discover that we aren't really standing alone after all. We are standing with all of God's children, faithfully praying and working together to bless mankind.

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