



**Service in Celebration of the life and words of Martin Luther King Jr.**

**The United Methodist Church of Newton**

**Jan 18, 2026**



Greetings

\*Gathering Music

**Heal Our Land**

*1. If my people will humble themselves, Humble themselves and pray. If they seek my face and humble themselves, And turn from their wicked ways. I will hear from heaven and forgive their sins. I will hear from heaven and heal their land.*

*[Refrain] Lord, heal our land. Father, heal our land. Hear our cry and turn our nation back to You Lord, heal our land. Hear us oh, Lord, and heal our land. Forgive our sin and heal our broken land.*

*2. Lord, we vow our knee, we humble ourselves. Humble ourselves and pray. Lord, we seek your face and humble ourselves. And turn from my wicked ways Father in Your mercy, forgive our sins. Father in Your mercy, come heal our land.*

**I Will Stand in the Congregation**

*I will stand in the congregation, and I will exalt You (x2).*

*Let the children of Your salvation lift Your praises too! Hallelujah, Hallelujah!*

*I will stand in the congregation, and I will praise Your name (x2).*

*With Your people in ev'ry nation I will shout this praise! Hallelujah!*

*You're the only inspiration for my praise O God, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!*

*We will join as a congregation and we will exalt You (x2).*

*We will sing as all creation lifts the song anew! Hallelujah, Hallelujah!*

**Welcome (W&S 3152)**

*Let's walk together for a while and ask where we begin.*

*To build a world where love can grow and hope can enter in*

*To be the hands of healing and to plant the seed of peace.*

*Singing welcome, welcome to this place. You're invited to come and know God's grace.*

*All are welcome, the love of God to share.*

*'Cause all of us are welcome here. All are welcome in this place.*

## \*Passing of the Peace

### \*Call to Worship

L: The Prophet Micah told us that the LORD requires us to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God. As we celebrate Martin Luther King's witness, let us be called to worship by some of the prophets of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1963, in his challenging letter to complacent white clergy in the South, Dr. King wrote, "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

**P: O God, we pray, transform our silence into action, our fear into courage.**

L: President John F. Kennedy in an address that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 said, "The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities; whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated."

**P: O God, we pray, help us to love you and to love others as ourselves.**

L: Rosa Parks said, "You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right. I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear."

**P: O God, we pray, remind us that you did not give us a spirit of fear.**

L: Ann Braden, a white Southern activist and ally of the Civil Rights movement wrote, "In every age, no matter how cruel the oppression carried on by those in power, there have been those who struggled for a different world. I believe this is the genius of humankind, the thing that makes us half divine: the fact that some human beings can envision a world that has never existed.

**P: O God, we pray, help us to envision and struggle for a world where justice will roll down like water, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

## Prayer of Confession and Words of Assurance

God of justice, we confess that in the pursuit of our own dreams and desires, we have not always been civil, not always humane, not always right. Guided by your Spirit, what we would like to do is change the world – make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as You intended them to do. Help us to be your witnesses, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute – the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, so that we can, with your help, change the world. Enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, and to love our enemy as our friend.

When we come before you with contrite heart, you say to us, "I forgive you and will be with you and lead you into light. And you will lead others into light." Amen

## \*Hymn

TFWS #2200, *O Lord Hear My Prayer*

*O Lord, hear my prayer O Lord, hear my prayer when I call answer me.  
O Lord, hear my prayer O Lord, hear my prayer Come and listen to me.*

## Faith in Action

## Scripture Lesson

Isaiah 1:12 When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; 13 bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and calling of convocation— I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. 14 Your

new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Micah. 6:6 “With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” 8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Children’s Message

Pastor Sunmin

\*Hymn

UMH #533, *We Shall Overcome*

[*Methodist preacher, African American Charles Albert Tindley is often credited for originally writing the lyrics of this hymn.*]

1. *We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome someday!  
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome someday!*

### **Reading 1. EARLY YEARS and MONTGOMERY**

On one very cold and very cloudy Saturday morning, January 15, 1929, just three months after the beginning of the worst economic depression in the history of the United States, Alberta Williams King and her husband, the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., welcomed their first child.

They named him Martin, after his father, and he would grow up to make it one of the most famous names in all of American history. Little Martin Luther King, Jr., would, in his lifetime, change the way people understood democracy, religion, race relations, and human relations, throughout the world.

Young Martin grew up in a relatively middle class home but in a very segregated Atlanta, Georgia. Though he never wanted for food or clothing, he knew that whenever he walked out of his door into white America, he faced the realities of prejudice and segregation.

Here are some of his own reflections on what it was like to grow up in a segregated world.

### **Reading 2**

*[Growing up] as an African American in America is not a comfortable existence. It means being a part of the company of the bruised, the battered, the scarred, and the defeated. Being a Negro in America means trying to smile when you want to cry. It means trying to hold on to physical life amid psychological death. It means the pain of watching your own children grow up with clouds of inferiority in their mental skies. It means having your legs cut off, and then being condemned for being a cripple. It means seeing your mother and father spiritually murdered by the slings and arrows of daily exploitation, and then being hated for being an orphan. Being a Negro in America means listening to suburban politicians talk eloquently against open housing while arguing in the same breath that they are not racists. It means being harried by day and haunted by night by a nagging sense of nobodiness and constantly fighting to be saved from the*

*poison of bitterness. It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died.*

### **Reading 3**

When he graduated from high school, King went on to Morehouse College in Atlanta, then Crozier Seminary in Pennsylvania. There he made straight A's and received a scholarship to go on to graduate school. He chose Boston University School of Theology and received a Ph.D. in Theology. In Boston he met a young woman named Coretta Christine Scott, who was a graduate student at the New England Conservatory of Music. They were married on June 18, 1953.

On December 1 of that year, as King was making plans for a series of Christmas sermons, a black seamstress in Montgomery named Rosa Parks, after a long day at work, refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus. She had done so before, but today she was tired. The Supreme Court had just desegregated the public schools, and she thought to herself that if desegregation was good enough for children, it was good enough for adults. So Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. The bus driver called the police, the police came and arrested her, and the town exploded.

Blacks were wanting to riot and whites were wanting to kill blacks who were wanting to riot. The black community elected young father, young preacher, young seminary graduate Martin Luther King to organize them to respond to the crisis. Over two thousand people rallied in front of a church that night to decide what they would do. The air was tense and explosive. It was a dangerous night for both blacks and whites. Rev. Martin Luther King stood up to speak to them that night and here are some of the words that he said.

### **Reading 4**

*We are here this evening for serious business. We're here in a general sense because first and foremost, we are American citizens, and we are determined to acquire our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. We are here also because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth.*

*But in our protests, there will be no cross burnings. No white person will be taken from his home by a hooded Negro mob and brutally murdered. There will be no threats and intimidation. We will be guided by the highest principles of law and order...the deepest principles of our Christian faith. Love must be our regulating ideal... .If we fail to do this, our protest will end up as a meaningless drama on the stage of history, and its memory will be shrouded with the ugly garments of shame. In spite of the mistreatment that we have confronted, we must not become bitter and end up by hating our white brothers. Let no people pull you down so low as to make you hate them.*

### **Reading 5**

Instead of a riot, they organized a boycott of the Montgomery buses, with car pools taking people to work. Non-violently, they brought the city to its knees. The city took them to court arguing for segregation all the way to the Supreme Court. Finally, after over a year of attacks and threats and thousands of daily hate letters and phone calls, after his home was bombed and the police refused to investigate, and after King himself was arrested and jailed twice and had to pay hundreds of dollars in fines, after the movement had to spend tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees and bail, after all of this and more, the Supreme Court declared that segregation of public transportation facilities was unconstitutional.

\*Hymn

UMH #533, *We Shall Overcome* (verses 2 & 3)

*2. We'll walk hand in hand, We'll walk hand in hand, We'll walk hand in hand someday!*

*Oh, deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome someday!*

*3. We shall all be free!*

**Reading 6**

In 1960 four black college students in Greensboro North Carolina went into a “Whites only” department store and tried to sit down at the lunch counter and be served. They were arrested, but they took it to court and a nation wide protest movement called “Sit ins” began.

In October of that year, Rev. King and several others joined a “sit-in” in Atlanta and demanded to be served food just like white people. They, too, were arrested. Later all were freed but King, who was sentenced to four months of hard labor in the Reidsville State Prison, the harshest maximum-security facility in the South.

But King did not spend the four months in prison. A young U.S. Senator and presidential candidate named John F. Kennedy personally called the judge who had sentenced him and talked him into reversing his decision. When King got out of jail, he held a press conference and praised Senator Kennedy for his help. The word spread of Kennedy’s help, and a few days later he received hundreds of thousands of votes from black voters who had never voted in an election in their entire lives. Kennedy won the presidential election by only 110,000 votes.

The reputation of Martin Luther King and the movement grew larger and larger through the early sixties. There were more sit-ins, more boycotts, and more protests, all slowly tearing down the most visible excesses of the walls of oppression and discrimination in America. But perhaps the turning point in his life, and the life of the movement, took place in 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama.

**Reading 7**

Birmingham was arguably the most oppressive and thoroughly segregated city in the nation in those days, with a long history of brutality and violence against its black citizens. The police commissioner of Birmingham was Eugene Connor, known as “Bull” Connor in the area. He was an angry, forceful racist who openly bragged about how many blacks he had beaten and killed in his lifetime. He promised that “blood would run in the streets” before Birmingham would desegregate its public facilities.

In April, 1963, the protest of Birmingham began, with boycotts, lunch-counter sit-ins, and daily marches, all done quietly and calmly, completely non-violently. “Bull” Connor began arresting protesters but hundreds more came. Over the weeks, the Birmingham jail had over three thousand people in it and yet more still came. King himself was one of those arrested early in the marches. Ironically, he was taken to jail on April 13, Good Friday, one hundred years to the day from when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. King spent the next ten days running the campaign from in the Birmingham Jail.

While there, he had been given a newspaper in which a number of white clergy had written a public letter criticizing him for pushing integration too quickly. He sat down in his cell and on pieces of newspaper, rags, toilet tissue, and backs of envelopes, he wrote a public response. It became known as the “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and it has become one of the most famous statements about non-violent civil disobedience written in this century. Here is a portion of what King wrote:

**Reading 8**

*April 16, 1963*

*My Dear Fellow Clergymen:*

*While confined here in Birmingham jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.”...Since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.*

*You told us that our protests were “untimely” and that we should trust you and “wait.” For centuries, the Negro has heard “wait,” and “wait” has nearly always meant “Never.” We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights... Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, “wait.”*

*But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will, and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television;...when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; ...when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness” — then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.*

\*Hymn

UMH # 533. We Shall Overcome (verses 4 & 5)

*4. We shall live in peace, We shall live in peace. We shall live in peace someday  
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe We shall all be free someday!*

*5 The Lord will see us through.*

### **Reading 9**

On August 28, 1963, he took part in the largest civil rights demonstration in history, in Washington DC. At that march, King was the major speaker, and he gave one of his most powerful and lasting statements on his philosophy and hopes and his dreams for all of America.

*“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

*I have a dream today...”*

\*Hymn

UMH #519, Lift Every Voice and Sing (1 & 2)

*1. Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty;  
let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies, let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;  
sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;  
facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won.*

2. *Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod, felt in the days when hope unborn had died; yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed? We have come over a way that with tears has been watered; we have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered, out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

### **What is your life's blueprint? (video)**

In 1967, King delivered a powerful speech focused on dignity and self-worth, excellence, love, and justice. He had especially in mind the younger generation, who needed to keep moving forward.

Here is the last 5 mins of his speech.

### **Reading 10. WASHINGTON and MEMPHIS**

Over the next few years, King's model of non-violence was increasingly ignored. Protesters who promoted violence seemed to be on the rise and people who promoted love and peace among all people seemed to be on the decline.

During this time, King was growing to believe that race was only one of the issues which was at the core of America's problems, and he began to plan the biggest march on Washington ever, to take place in August, 1968. This time the march would not be specifically about black people or civil rights, but about poverty. He called it the "Poor People's Campaign." This would be an opportunity, he thought, to reframe the civil rights movement in a much broader context, and to regain its moral tone and direction that had seemed to be waning in recent years.

But right in the middle of planning for the march, King was asked to come to Memphis, Tennessee, to lend support to striking sanitation workers. On April 3, 1968, sick with the flu and without notes or manuscript or any idea of what he was going to say, King delivered before 2,000 people one of the most stirring speeches of his life.

### **Reading 11**

*All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren't going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.*

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*...I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And God's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know*

*tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing anyone. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.*

### **Reading 12**

The next day at six o'clock in the evening, Martin Luther King, Jr., Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, and several others were standing on the second floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, waiting to go to dinner.

Just then they heard the sound of a shot ringing out. King slammed backwards against the wall of the balcony and then fell forward onto the balcony floor. Ralph Abernathy rushed out to him. Someone else found a pillow to put under his head. A secret service agent held a towel to the wound in his neck to try and stop the bleeding. Others were running up the stairs, some were running for cover, some were screaming.

During the next few minutes, Abernathy held the head of his dearest, closest friend in his lap while waiting for an ambulance to arrive, and watching the life bleed out of him. He spoke to Martin several times during those minutes, but Martin could only respond with his eyes. Years later Ralph said that he heard much from those eyes that night. Martin Luther King looked at him very awake, and very alert, and with his eyes he seemed to be speaking very clearly. He was saying, "Ralph, it isn't over. It's in other people's hands now. Don't give up. Never give up. Never give up. Never give up." ...And then he died. He was 39 years old.

### **Reading 14**

PROCLAMATION FOR MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY, 1986:

"Let all Americans continue to carry forward the banner that...fell from Dr. King's hands. Today, all over America, libraries, hospitals, parks and thoroughfares proudly bear his name. His likeness appears on more than 100 postage stamps issued by dozens of nations around the globe. Today we honor him with speeches and monuments.

But let us do more.

Let all Americans of every race and creed and color work together to build in this blessed land a shining city of...justice and harmony. This is the monument Dr. King would have wanted most of all."

\*Hymn

UMH #519, *Lift Every Voice and Sing* (verse 3)

*3. God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, thou who hast brought us thus far on the way; thou who hast by thy might led us into the light, keep us forever in the path, we pray.*

*Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;  
lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;  
shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand,  
true to our God, true to our native land.*

Invitation to Offering

UMH# 94 "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God whose creatures here below. Hallelujah, Hallelujah. Praise God the source of all our gifts. Praise Jesus Christ whose power uplifts. Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah."

\*Prayer of Dedication

*Lord, you have called us to this place, the Body of Christ, so that we become one body in Christ. The pain, suffering, discrimination, indignity and injustice that our neighbors have are ours as well. When we rise up against all these, we stand up against evil together as one body and we get close to you. Lord, we pray that these little gifts we prepared this morning are used as small steps to rise against all injustice and evil of this world. Amen.*

The Lord's Supper

UMH 15.

Prayer Concerns & Pastoral Prayer

Favorite Hymn of MLK

UMH #474, *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*

- 1. Precious Lord, take my hand, Lead me on, let me stand, I am tired, I am weak, I am worn; Through the storm, through the night, Lead me on to the light: Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home.*
- 2. When my way grows drear, Precious Lord, linger near, When my life is almost gone, Hear my cry, hear my call, Hold my hand lest I fall: Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home.*
- 3. When the darkness appears And the night draws near, And the day is past and gone, At the river I stand, Guide my feet, hold my hand: Take my hand, precious Lord, Lead me home.*

Benediction