

**SPEECH GIVEN BY REV. MICHAEL L. PFLEGER
FOR 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR
APRIL 4, 2018
MEMPHIS, TN
LORRAINE MOTEL BALCONY**

As Harry Belafonte once said, “Sometimes the good Lord makes himself a person who gets hold of the vision of God and what is possible for the world.

And that vision guides him as he grows and struggles, stumbles and sorrows.

It doesn’t happen often, but when it does then even the stars cry out in witness to his vision and the hills and towers will echo his words and deeds. And his witness will live in the hearts of men forever.

That kind of man is dangerous to the sloppy ways of the world.

Because that man loves truth more than his own life.

That kind of man will do what he sees as justice even if the earth seeks to swallow him up. And his deeds will persist in the land forever.

So you look at him, look at him awhile, and be thankful the Lord let such a man touch our lives even, if it were for only a little while.”

Martin Luther King Jr. was such a man.

And because he was, there is and has been a great and aggressive move to water down his message, and to sanitize his words, to make him comfortable to the status quo and acceptable to the American palate.

Yes, there has been an aggressive effort to hijack his very identity.

But we must be clear, that Dr. King’s message was both prophetic and radical, and rooted in the radical message of Jesus Christ, which was his foundation.

Dr. King, was tied to a God of love and justice.

His loyalty was to God and his faith is what summoned him to his activism.

Dr. King was uncompromising in his commitment to eradicate war, racism, and poverty.

And he was ever determined in his quest to tear down the door of justice and opportunity that stood closed to the masses left outside.

Martin Luther King Jr was uncompromising in his charge to subpoena the conscience of America and demand she stand before the seat of morality and face her hypocrisy and make good on the promises that she put down on paper.

Martin Luther King Jr. demanded, as he said at the funeral of the four little girls in Birmingham, that we must not only arrest the person who created the bomb, But arrest the society that created such a man.

He called us to dismantle the systems that created poverty, racism, and injustice.

He called us, yes, to do acts of charity, but also have the courage to demand justice.

Martin Luther King Jr stood up against hoses and dogs, bullies and bullets, yet never compromised in his commitment to non-violence,

Teaching us that love is still the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of truth and justice.

Martin Luther King Jr challenge us to set aside personal safety and success for the greater good for all human kind and commanded us to live with a sense of otherness.

Martin Luther King Jr, on April 4, 1967, confronted the evil of the Vietnam War encountering the attack and denial of some of his own supporters.

Because he was committed to the world house and reminded us truth has no borders.

Martin Luther King Jr. in his letter from the Birmingham jail gave perhaps his harshest criticism for the community of faith, whose silence had made them coconspirators to evil and injustice and made them passive supporters of the status quo.

He challenged them to rise from their beds of apathy,
and come out from the comfortability of their padded
pews and stained glass windows

And recover from their spiritual laryngitis,

In order to reclaim their moral conscience and recommit
themselves to the ministry of the valley.

Yes, Martin Luther King's ministry was not one of political
correctness or safe theology,

Rather he believed that the church should be dangerous
to evil and see as its responsibility

To shatter the darkness with light, expose lies with truth,
and display the weakness of hate when faced with the
power of love.

And because of that 50 years ago, while standing on this
balcony, evil and the forces of hate

Sought to stop him – and shut him up.

Only to find out that a bullet could silence his voice, but
not his message nor the truth that lived in him.

For that reason I challenge you, brothers and sisters, and
myself on this 50th anniversary of his assassination

That we don't make the mistake America would have us to make,

And that is to gather here, and places around the world, To simply remember Dr. King and relegate his life to some nostalgic or historic event and then continue with business as usual.

Because if we do, then I believe we become the present day coconspirators of his assassination

For the worst injustice we can do to Dr. King is to simply remember him.

But if we indeed want to honor Martin Luther King Jr then we must be willing to pick up his mantle, accept his prophetic call, and continue his uncompromising mission.

We must preach the sermon he never got a chance to preach and remind America she may indeed go to hell if she does not repent for the evil injustice and abandonment to the poor.

For America has too long reneged on her promise to ensure life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all of

her citizens and risks being sent to hell by the very God she claims to honor.

Brothers and sisters we live in a day where the chains of injustice continue to hold masses of brothers and sisters in captivity.

We live in a day where morality has been downgraded and we are experiencing a spiritual black out.

We live in a day where truth has been tucked away in the closet, and hate and supremacy and entitlement has been given new breath by a president who has made them his friends.

And while confederate flags may have been lowered, their spirit yet fly high and strong.

We live in a day where religion has been high jacked and government has become dysfunctional.

Our children live in fear of a bullet in a country who has a love affair with guns and chosen blood money over our children's blood,

A country where the quality of education yet depends on your zip code and violence has become an acceptable norm,

And yes, where black lives still don't matter,

And masses of brothers and sisters crawl under viaducts to find rest and search through garbage cans to find food.

Yes, we live in a country where the cries of sanitation workers 50 years ago are still the cries of masses of people across America who are either unemployed or working minimum wage jobs holding them captive by the chains of poverty, not allowing mothers or fathers to take care of themselves or their families.

Yes, brothers and sisters the question for you and I today is whether we will rise up to the challenge before us

And push the hand of this midnight hour to the dawn of a new day and dedicate ourselves, like Martin, to the suffering and alienated of our society.

The question is will we wake up our outrage at the disparities and unequal playing fields that have become

an acceptable norm and replace our cynicism with hope, and our fear with faith?

Will we purpose in our hearts to take the venom of hate out of the blood stream of America's veins and give her a transfusion with the blood of truth, justice, love, and righteousness?

Will we commit ourselves to holding American accountable to her promises and give her back her soul?

Or will we be co assassins to Martin's assassination by our silence and safeness.

Brothers and sisters in the name of Martin Luther King Jr, and in the name of the God he served,

I challenge you and myself to have a divine dissatisfaction within us that causes us to make the world uncomfortable with injustice,

And makes us courageous enough to bear the wounds of redemptive suffering and committed sacrifice.

Because we believe that light is still more powerful than darkness, love is still more powerful than hate, hope is still more powerful than hopelessness, peace is still more

powerful than violence, and truth is still more powerful than lies.

Many of those gathered here today may not have been at Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham or Memphis 50 years ago,

But we are here now.

This is our time,

This is our opportunity,

Martin's dream is in our hands.

And we will be accountable by generations yet unborn and by the God who places us here for such a time as this.

How will Martin see us in the days to come?

Will we be the drum majors who continue his legacy?

Or the co assassins who simply remember him.

The answer to that question will demonstrate how much we truly honor and love Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

God help us.