



February 21, 2017

Black History Month – Faith, Hope and Love

We are in our third week of Black History Month. Last Sunday's bible readings at my church, St. Martin de Porres at Washington and Laramie in Chicago, were very appropriate for Black History Month. Jesus speaks against the teaching of an "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth"; "You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

Jesus didn't say that...

Instead, Jesus said:

"I say to you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your heavenly Father,
for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good,
and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.
For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have?"

We are also reminded that we should not look at the faults of our enemies but instead look for their needs. Jesus also said in the readings, "You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people." When I think about the struggles of Blacks in America, I can only think about the pain and the struggles that black families have had and continue to have in the fight for the most basic rights. How difficult it is not to do the wrong thing when others do you wrong!

We always seem to be given examples to increase our faith and add to our hope. There is no hope without faith. God knew that sometimes we would find it hard to believe in the mystery of faith, so he gave us many examples of faith to believe in. It is that faith that gives us hope - the hope to believe that no weapon formed against us can prosper. This faith leads to the hope that we can not only love those who love us, but is a faith that leads to the hope that we can love even those who don't love us.

President Nelson Mandela, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and examples in our own lives are reminders of faith that can lead to real hope.

After having spent 27 years in prison for trying to end white-minority rule in South Africa through violence, Nelson Mandela became a symbol of peace by an almost unbelievable reconciliation with individuals who had been the instruments of his oppression during his captivity. I often wonder how history would have been written with an angry and vengeful Mandela. Mandela showed what it means to be slow to anger and rich in love.

Mandela lived out the Word of the Lord and decided to do what was right after 27 years of oppression and imprisonment.

President Nelson Mandela showed four acts of forgiveness that showed all South Africans a peaceful path away from apartheid:

1. Mandela invited one of his former jailers to dinner.
2. Mandela invited his former prison guard to his inauguration ceremony when he became the President of South Africa.
3. Mandela had lunch with the man who tried to have him killed.
4. Mandela wore the Springbok rugby jersey at the 1995 Rugby World Cup final.

During the apartheid era, few symbols summed up oppression for Mandela and his ANC colleagues than the hated green Springbok jersey. And Mandela understood the power of the symbolism of wearing the jersey, loving his enemies, and becoming a symbol of peace and hope.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is another example of faith leading to hope. Dr. King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." Dr. King lived out the Word of the Lord and decided to do what is right when he peacefully led marches against dogs, stones and fire hoses. He told his followers to keep moving - no eye for an eye - love your enemies - have your faith lead to hope. King said, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that". Even if someone disrespected him, King didn't pick up a gun to retaliate. He knew that adding to the violence wouldn't get him or the country where he wanted to go. I often wonder what history would say about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. if he hadn't done what was right.

Both Jesus and Dr. King warned us that we will have some difficult days ahead. They both said: fear no man. It is our job to try to let our little light shine everywhere we go. It is our little light that can help drive out darkness in our community.

Where would South Africa be without the light of Nelson Mandela and where would America be without the light of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? But, we have much work left to do! All of us must intensify our faith and our hope to show that light in our own world - to live out the Word of the Lord and to do what is right. Faith leads to hope - hope without faith is actually hopelessness. We have waited too long for our freedom. We can no longer wait. Now is the time to intensify the radical struggle of love on all fronts. To relax our efforts now would be a mistake which generations to come will not be able to forgive. The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts in faith and hope, through love.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'La Shawn K. Ford'. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'L' and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District