

Every year in the United States we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. This is a national holiday that is unlike any other recognized by our country. MLK Day is a reminder for us to reflect upon the life and legacy of one of our country's greatest revolutionaries and socio-religious heroes. Dr. King was passionate about the value of all human life, regardless of race, religion, or economic class. He spoke of his dream for the day when all people would live in equality with one another and peace would reign in the hearts of all people and relationships. In an age of racism and segregation, many suggested, and some practiced, violent retaliation and forceful resistance against those considered enemies. However, Dr. King, a Baptist minister and follower of Jesus, spoke of a different kind of *spiritual movement*:

We are outnumbered; we do not have access to the instruments of violence. Even more than that, not only is violence impractical, but it is immoral; for it is my firm conviction that to seek to retaliate with violence does nothing but intensify the existence of evil and hate in the universe... I believe firmly that love is a transforming power that can lift a whole community to new horizons of fair play, good will and justice.¹

Q1: How did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. respond to the racism and segregation of his day? What else do you know about Dr. King and his role in the civil rights movement? Research this great hero of our nation and faith and ask your family what they know about him (<http://www.thekingcenter.org/>).

The movement embraced and modeled by Dr. King is known as *nonviolent resistance*. The practice is a spiritual discipline that responds to evil, hatred, and violence not with more evil, hatred, and violence. Instead, nonviolent resistance seeks to overcome evil with good. Sound kind of strange? That is because we are not used to stories that celebrate or illustrate nonviolence. Instead, we dwell in a world saturated with movies, cartoons, music, video games, books, and superheroes that practice and teach violence as the justified response to evil. It can even be a form of entertainment. Watch the video on the website or through link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdSJwpczAAQ>

Q2: Think of the following examples. What are the storylines of each and how does the *good guy* respond to the *bad guy*? 1) Tom and Jerry 2) Batman 3) Halo What are some other examples of stories where violence is portrayed as the necessary and appropriate means to overcoming evil?

All these stories represent what is called the *myth of redemptive violence*. That is, the belief that evil and violence can actually be overcome by the same tools of violence. However, you may notice that in each of the stories mentioned above, as well as others, violence only produces more violence. It is an endless cycle. I think that is exactly why Martin Luther King responded the way that he did. He knew it was actually more effective and Christ-like.

Q3: How does Martin Luther King, Jr. and his response to racism compare to the responses of the "heroes" in Q2 and the *Silver Surfer* comic (right)²? (Check out the link on the website for an illustration of *nonviolent resistance in the 1950's*)



¹ Cited in *Spiritual Classic*. Ed. Richard Foster and Emile Griffith San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000. p. 280.

² Taken from Wink, Walter. *Engaging the Powers*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. 230.



As mentioned above, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s movement of nonviolent resistance was deeply connected to the Gospel and his faith in Jesus.

READ Matthew 5:38-42

Q4: How does Jesus call his disciples to respond to enemies? How is this like MLK? How is it unlike what we read and watch in the culture?

READ Matthew 26:47-56

Q5: How does Peter want to respond to those about to arrest Jesus? What is Jesus' response and how does this relate to nonviolence?

READ Romans 12:14-21

Q6: What is the dream and vision of this passage? How does it call followers of Jesus to live, especially in relation to our enemies? How does this parallel the teachings of Jesus and the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

READ Colossians 1:15-20

Q7: How does this passage suggest that Jesus made peace? How does this compare to the typical methods for "making peace" that we hear about in the news, watch on the movies, and maybe play in our video games (see examples in Q2)?

The Scriptures witness to God's dreams for peace in a world saturated in violence. Even more so, God has moved for peace in the gift of Jesus and his sacrifice for us upon the cross. In Jesus, all the sin, evil, hatred, bitterness, anger, and violence of the world were absorbed by his death and overcome by the resurrection. In the resurrection, we are reminded that violence is not the victor; rather, Jesus is and his mission of peace and justice for the whole world.

This dream of peace is difficult to live into when we have so many models of violence and celebrate so little heroes of peace. Isaiah refers to one of the more significant hopes of the people of God, "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4). A day will come when we do not learn of war and violence, and only know peace. Until then we need to celebrate those who teach us and make peace in how they live and influence others to live peacefully.

Q8: Ask your family about some of the world's great "peacemakers." Who are they? What did they do?

Finally, one of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite sections of Scripture was the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus.

READ Matthew 5:1-12 and pay particular attention to 5:9.

Q9: Who does Jesus call blessed in 5:9? Find a way this week to creatively pursue peace. Maybe pray for wars and victims of war. Maybe read through the Bible and notice places where it talks of peace. Maybe think about the areas of conflict in your own life, ask God to grant you and help you to live into peace. Find a creative way to love an enemy and pray for those you usually do not consider a friend.

The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. *The creed is a communal "confession of hope" (Hebrews 10:23)*. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Read begin to memorize the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about God.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

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