



Week 1

PRE-READINGS:

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THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

As described by The King Center, the institution which Coretta Scott King founded in order to memorialize the life and legacy of Martin Luther King and further his goals, Dr. King's vision and ministry were focused on "The Beloved Community":

"The Beloved Community" is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world.

For Dr. King, "The Beloved Community" was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. ***Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.*** In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful



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conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully, and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

As early as 1956, Dr. King spoke of The Beloved Community as the end goal of nonviolent boycotts. As he said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery's busses, ***"the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men."***

An ardent student of the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Dr. King was much impressed with the Mahatma's befriending of his adversaries, most of whom professed profound admiration for Gandhi's courage and intellect. Dr. King believed that the age-old tradition of hating one's opponents was not only immoral, but bad strategy which perpetuated the cycle of revenge and retaliation. Only nonviolence, he believed, had the power to break the cycle of retributive violence and create lasting peace through reconciliation.

In a 1957 speech, *Birth of A New Nation*, Dr. King said, "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence is emptiness and bitterness." A year later, in his first book *Stride Toward Freedom*, Dr. King reiterated the importance of nonviolence in attaining The Beloved Community. In other words, our ultimate goal is integration, which is genuine inter-group and inter-personal living. Only through nonviolence can this goal be attained, for the aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of the Beloved Community.

In his 1959 *Sermon on Gandhi*, Dr. King elaborated on the after-effects of choosing nonviolence over violence: "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle's over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor." In the same sermon, he contrasted violent versus nonviolent resistance to oppression. "The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community."



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The core value of the quest for Dr. King's Beloved Community was agape love. Dr. King distinguished between three kinds of love: Eros, "a sort of aesthetic or romantic love"; philia, "affection between friends" and agape, which he described as "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all," an "overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative"..."the love of God operating in the human heart." He said that "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both...Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community."

In his 1963 sermon, *Loving Your Enemies*, published in his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. King addressed the role of unconditional love in struggling for the beloved Community. ***'With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.'***

One expression of agape love in Dr. King's Beloved Community is justice, not for any one oppressed group, but for all people. As Dr. King often said, ***"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."*** He felt that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups but was the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community. I have fought too long hard against segregated public accommodations to end up segregating my moral concerns," he said. "Justice is indivisible."

In a July 13, 1966 article in *Christian Century Magazine*, Dr. King affirmed the ultimate goal inherent in the quest for the Beloved Community: "I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community"

In keeping with Dr. King's teachings, The King Center embraces the conviction that the Beloved Community can be achieved through an unshakable commitment to nonviolence. We urge you to study Dr. King's six principles and six steps of nonviolence, and make them a way life in your personal relationships, as well as a method for resolving social, economic and political conflicts, reconciling adversaries and advancing social change in your community, nation and world.



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SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. What spoke to you in this teaching lesson?
2. When you envision community, what does that look like for you?
3. How is King's Beloved Community a prescription for a loving society? How can it play a part in the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is heaven?
4. Economic and Social Justice are the twin pillars supporting the Beloved Community, these twin pillars are necessary for a healthy society. What would be the health impacts of living of such a society?
5. In the pre-reading, The Beloved Community describes, ***racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.*** For the church, what does it mean to be an "all-inclusive spirit?"
6. In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes, "hope does not disappoint us." Where do you find hope today?

POST-WORK FOR NEXT WEEK:

Read "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" written by Martin Luther King, Jr.

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View the non-fiction film commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

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ADDITIONAL READINGS:

- *Rediscipling the White Church*, David Swanson
- *Radical Reconciliation*, Allan Aubrey & Curtis Paul DeYoung
- *Embrace*, Leroy Barber
- *Red, Brown, Yellow, Black, White-Who's More Precious in God's Sight?* Leroy Barber and Velma Maia Thomas
- *Reconciling All Things*, by Emmanuel Katongole & Chris Rice
- *America's Unholy Ghosts*, by Joel Edward Goza
- *Trouble I've Seen*, by Drew Hart
- *Race, Real Estate, and Uneven Development*, by Kevin Fox Gotham
- *Where do we go from here?* by Martin Luther King, Jr.

