

Many Voices. One Spirit.

(The Common Good)

I Corinthians 12.1-11

We who believe in freedom shall not rest.

We who believe in freedom shall not rest until it comes.

This is the chorus of a song called Ella's Song written by Bernice Reagon, one of the founding voices of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Why begin with Ella Baker if tomorrow we celebrate the birthday of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.? Well, do we think of King and then think of the civil rights movement? Or do we think of the civil rights movement and then think of King? What exactly are we celebrating tomorrow?

King is certainly the one who was the face of the movement. He was the leader. His words are the ones we'll see splashed all over social media, on News12's coverage of local events, in the LoHud paper. And hopefully, we'll hear and read more than the familiar lines or two from the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom or the sermon he preached the night before his assassination:

I have a dream that one day right there in Alabama little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed - we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

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 He'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!

These are all good, and maybe will dig a little deeper and somebody will pull out a quote from the speech he gave about the War in Vietnam at Riverside Church

And so we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. And so we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

The March on Detroit

There can be no great social gain without individual pain. And before the victory for brotherhood is won, some will have to get scarred up a bit. Before the victory is won, some more will be thrown into jail. Before the victory is won, some, like Medgar Evers, may have to face physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children and their white brothers from an eternal psychological death, then nothing can be more redemptive. Before the victory is won, some will be misunderstood and called bad names, but we must go on with a determination and with a faith that this problem can be solved. (Yeah)

[Applause]

A Knock at Midnight

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate actively in the struggle for peace and for economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions and cause men everywhere to say that it has atrophied its will.

Or even that prayer that started our service today.

The popular narrative says we honor the one was in front, the one who died for the cause. And the Apostle Paul said ⁴ ***Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;*** ⁵ ***and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;*** ⁶ ***and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.*** ⁷ ***To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***

And so I've come to honor King this morning and I'll do so this afternoon at our interfaith service and I'll continue tomorrow at Antioch's Educational Seminar. But this morning I've also come to honor some of the other people who worked for the common good. We know that movements are made up of many people with many talents and that they bring those talents to the work for the common good. I also know there are people who won't ever have a nationally recognized day to honor their service. Somebody might light the spark, but it's up to everybody to fan that flame and keep it lit. These somebodys disrupt the narrative for the common good.

Ella Baker - Worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

Annie Lee Cooper - Cooper had stood in line for hours outside the Dallas County Courthouse to register to vote. Clark ordered the 224-pound, 54-year-old African-American woman to go home. Cooper claimed he poked her in the back of the neck with either a billy club or a cattle prod. Cooper turned and delivered a right hook to the sheriff's jaw. He dropped to the ground..

Dorothy Cotton - Trainer and worked with Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Diane Nash - A founder of SNCC, worked with SCLC, was a key strategist of the Selma march

Dorothy Haight - She organized Wednesdays in Mississippi which brought together black and white women from the north and south to dialogue. She was the founding member of the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership. She has also been described

as one of the Big Six of the Civil Rights Movement, but her role was often ignored by the press because she was a woman.

Fannie Lou Hamer - One of the founders of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party a woman who was almost beaten to death for trying to register to vote but who is also known for saying "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." Her voice was so powerful that during a televised hearing about her experience, LBJ interrupted the broadcast.

Nina Simone - Whose voice was one of the voices of the movement. To Be Young Gifted and Black. Why the King of Love is Dead.

Bertha Burruss - The Mississippi Queen of the mule trains that brought people to Washington for the Poor People's Campaign.

Rosa Parks - Was she the woman who just one day decided to refuse to give up her seat on the bus? Or was she a woman who was trained at the Highlander School and was selected as part of a very intentional strategy?

Bayard Rustin - A close friend and confidante of King who organized the march on 3x5 index cards and who was openly gay.

Amelia Boynton - Worked with SCLC and there is a picture of her lying on the ground after having been beaten.

The Black Lives Matter hashtag was started by three black women - *Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi* - in 2013. Two of them are queer and one is Nigerian and the hashtag came about because they all felt something had to be done after George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Cullors is the the Truth and Reinvestment Director at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Garza is the Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance and she organizes at the intersections of racial, economic and gender justice.

Tometi is the ED of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, which is the country's only national immigrant rights organization for black immigrants.

Their concern for this country is what brought them and their work together for the common good.

What will we do, how will we do, when will we do, with whom will we work for the common good in 2016?

You don't have to come up with another hashtag. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. You only have to turn the wheel. Or as Mavis Staples would say, all you have to do is keep your hand on the plow and hold on.

The same Spirit, the same Lord and the same God is working in and through all of us. See, it's kind of a set up really. The apostle doesn't give us an out. We have enough gifts, ministries and enough of God's power to accomplish what needs to be accomplished. Rev. Paul Briggs used to say that if something isn't getting done it's because somebody hasn't stepped up to the plate to do it.

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere. The ministries are carried out everywhere. ; but they all originate in God's Spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. What will you do?

Help people who are trying to reignite the Poor People's Campaign?

Advocate for Domestic Worker's Rights?

Attend a talk about the ICE raids?

Write a letter to Governor Snyder about the hazardous waste that's masquerading as water in Flint, Michigan and is killing a community that is poor and majority black?

Michelle Alexander believes in the movement to end mass incarceration. Is this where you will lend your energy? Will you hire somebody who may have a record because of a non-violent criminal offense that has prevented them from working and rejoining society after incarceration?

Call somebody out for their racism? For their privilege? For their colorblindness?

Advocate for affordable housing so somebody like me could afford to live in the town of my birth?

Speak kindly to the cashier at Target who probably spends close to \$140 on a monthly train pass

Teach a child to read?

Find out more about more about the Moral Monday Movement led by William Barber that is bringing people from every ethnicity and from across both sides of the aisle to combat injustice?

Join a book discussion about Jim Wallis' book about racism and privilege?

Will you turn off the TV and read up on some of the people I mentioned today?

Will you become an ally? A comrade? A friend? A co-laborer in the struggle?

How will you be the manifestation, the revelation, the visible presence of God's Spirit in this world of ours?