



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

January 19, 2025 - How Long?

(Luke 4:14-30)

I got to the next sections of the Main Street Church History this week. In it I read about the funding to convert the upstairs of the carriage house for a youth gathering spot in 1968 - with some expectations/limitation defining the space. "They were in hopes of strengthening the membership in the senior high, but we must keep in mind that the program cannot and will not be allowed to degenerate into a drop-in, hangout, purposeless gathering of teenagers who come, just because there's nothing else to do...." Kathy? Gay?

I also read about the church taking a position in support of civil rights, then for the affirmation of all God's people when we became an Open and Affirming Church, then to continue the ancient tradition of the church as a place of sanctuary when we became a Level 1 Sanctuary Church. I also read about sewing machines funded for a teaching program in Haiti, folks going to New Orleans to clean up after Hurricane Katrina, others at Camp Sunshine. Those that compiled those next sections of our history captured more of the spirit and active ministry. I learned about things that happened before I got to be part of this congregation and I was reminded of things that have happened in our time together.

There is a whole mumble jumble of emotions going on for me. Reading this history of significant ministry yet painfully aware of the ongoing brokenness and need that remains. I am reading this history as wild fires burn, a cease fire may or may not finally happen and a new president is inaugurated. The realities and fears and challenges around us are huge. These ministries of Main Street Church' past have not erased all the pain or hurt. Do they matter?

I am reading this history as we honor the life of Jimmy Carter and the Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They both lived in unsettled times. They both faced mountains of resistance and violence. They both responded to all that mess with acts of love, justice, community, compassion. They both were rooted in the story and truth of God's love loose and powerful in the world. The life and teachings of Jesus shaped their lives. They lived their faith in community.

There is much that I am concerned about with the new administration. There are people I love who are threatened and scared by discussed and proposed policies and there are people that would be scared and challenged if the other political candidate had won the election. The country has many challenges, the world has many challenges and we have the opportunity to respond to those challenges with the faith of Carter and King which is to trust in the power of resurrecting love and join in the ways of Jesus to be part of bringing healing and peace and hospitality to life.

The Church is needed in the reality of now. Needed for actions to bring about change and words which proclaim God's love and light present and powerful in the world that is. Jimmy

Carter said, "My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I can, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference." Those can be our action words, words that can bring about change.

Carter's words ring the same cry as we heard from Luke. And Luke has the cry of the prophet Isaiah. It is an ancient and ongoing invitation and call to a way of life. To bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. We are created with purpose. We are infused with the spirit to be part of healing and transforming.

As Jesus begins his ministry, he quotes those words from the Prophet Isaiah. He declares his purpose is care and attention for those who are marginalized left out, over looked, unwelcome. For those of us who chose to follow him, for those of us who gather as Church, that is our purpose as well. It is daunting. We can be overwhelmed and/but we are not sent out to figure this all out and accomplish it on our own. Isaiah said it and Jesus said it - the spirit of the Lord is upon them, upon us. It is Jimmy Carter's faith that gave him his mandate. Jimmy Carter's faith led him to be present and connected to a church where he served and taught in community. Martin Luther King created the beloved community. We don't do it alone. We do it with each other and God. The Creator of the Universe, the God of Resurrection is present and infusing us with what we need for our ministry in this time.

I had many profound experiences as I walked the ancient pilgrimage route of the Camino de Santiago. Many times my heart welled up and tears flowed as I felt myself in the footsteps of others who have sought to follow Jesus's way. Who have lived in the realities of their own times and chosen to love, work for justice and peace, welcome the stranger, be generous. There was life giving energy flowing on those ancient trails and filling me. I felt myself part of the ancient story which is in motion but not yet fulfilled.

I feel those same emotions with you Main Street Church. We have inherited a faith and we live it out in our contemporary realities. We join in the same work as Isaiah and Jesus did empowered by the same God.

The hip-hop artist J Kwest also known as the Rev Julian DeShazier senior minister of University Church in Chicago says "that this dark moment in our nation's history is not going to determine if we as a people are well or not. Our spirits will not be tied to this mess or the xenophobia that has caused it, because whoever wins an election, we the believers in love and justice still have work to do, people to hold to account, relationships to build. The difference is whose office we call and how loud we shout"

The challenges are many but none more that our God can handle. In a 1965 speech Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr gave voice to the challenge and the power of God - "I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody's asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, and truth bear it?"

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, (Yes, sir) however

frustrating the hour, it will not be long, (No sir) because “truth crushed to earth will rise again.”
(Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (Yes, sir) because “no lie can live forever.” (Yes, sir) [How long? Not
long, (All right. How long) because “you shall reap what you sow.” (Yes, sir)

[How long? (How long?) Not long: (Not long)

Truth forever on the scaffold, (Speak)

Wrong forever on the throne, (Yes, sir)

Yet that scaffold sways the future, (Yes, sir)

And, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadow,

Keeping watch above his own.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends
toward justice. (Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (Not long) because:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; (Yes, sir)

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;

(Yes) He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword; (Yes,
sir)

His truth is marching on. (Yes, sir)

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; (Speak,

sir) He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat. (That’s
right) O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant my feet!

Our God is marching on. (Yeah)

Glory, hallelujah! (Yes, sir) Glory, hallelujah! (All right)

Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on. [Applause]”. Amen

Martin Luther King (How Long, not Long March 25, 1965)

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