
A Call to Community

**An article from the *Cathedral Times* by
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Many of you have heard me preach on the occasion of the remembrance of Martin Luther King, Jr. This weekend, our country remembers him with a holiday, and The Episcopal Church designates that this Monday can be one of two possible days on which to remember him. (Actually, such a dual possibility is unusual in The Episcopal Church; most of our saints are remembered on the days of their deaths "" April 4 for King "" for that was their entrance into greater glory. The Episcopal Church acknowledges that the day of Martin Luther King's birth can also be used, since so much of The United States is remembering him on his birthday.)

At any rate, I suppose that each of us has our favorite M.L. King theme or quotation. Maybe it's the "I Have a Dream" speech, or "I've Been to the Mountaintop," or his entire "Letters from a Birmingham Jail." My favorite theme, if you have heard me say anything at all, is "beloved community."

One of King's great messages, among many, was that we were all called to be part of God's beloved community. The image of beloved community had potency for King on several levels, just as it had such power for other Christian theologians. It is a gospel phrase. Last year in the [Cathedral Times \(16 January 2011\)](#), I wrote these words,

Martin Luther King, Jr. was fond of the phrase "beloved community," and I associate the image with him; but he was not its originator. I would claim that its origin goes back to the New Testament itself. "Beloved" is a dear phrase in the New Testament, from the instant in which Jesus is called "beloved" at his baptism, to the countless instances in which Saint Paul describes his church members as "beloved" (five times in the Epistle to the Philippians). God really does love Jesus, who called the church into being. The church's great apostle, Paul, really did love his people. The church is meant to be a community, beloved of God, beloved by each other, and beloved for the world.

In a time when our culture is confused about community, I believe the church has the calling and gift to be true community, to be "Beloved Community." We are meant to gather together, to learn and laugh together, to love and cry together. And, together, we account for each other. We teach each other and hold each other to standards of civility and grace. We love (and live) for the long term and not the short term. The Christian Church, at our best, offers true and beloved community.

... of course, in a beloved community, our ultimate values are the same values as the One who "loves" us. And it is a peaceful and just God who loves us. Such is the God who inspired Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to realize that the church's values of peace and non-violence could be a model for the world around us. That world certainly includes the political world, in which we all play a part. Dr. King's vision of a beloved community came to include, not just the church, but the world itself. And that is our calling, too. All of us have a part in today's political world, to risk ourselves, to give ourselves, to the peace and love, honor and respect, of a truly beloved community. I thank God for everyone who shows up in the public square, for the common good, to take that risk.

This year, I obviously repeat those words! But let me add one thing more, relating community to this holy season of Epiphany. Epiphany is meant to be our season of "light-shining;" we are meant to be showing the light of Jesus Christ to the

world. Epiphany is a great evangelism season!

So, my Epiphany/Martin Luther King question is this: Who have you invited into beloved community? If God "" and Martin Luther King "" calls you and me to beloved community, to whom have we handed on the invitation? Who have we called to beloved community?

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