

Isaiah 58: 6-12
Psalm 15
James 1: 22-27
Matthew 25:31-40

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St. Martin in-the-Fields
The Feast of St. Martin
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Go Forth into the World

Lord God you clothed your servant Martin the soldier with the spirit of sacrifice and set him as a bishop in your church to be a defender of the faith: Give us grace to follow in his holy steps, that, at the last, we may be found clothed with righteousness in the dwellings of peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

As we enter this sanctuary through its main entrance, we pass beneath an exquisite stained glass window that honors St. Martin, our patron saint. When we sit and face the altar, we see Jesus, coming to us and reaching out with a chalice of his liberating, life-giving blood. And just to your left is Mary, a homeless teenager and mother of God, who said “Yes” to something as preposterous as it was unimaginable and her “Yes” changed the world.

Among them is a trinity of hope. We have everything we need for whatever lies ahead. We know who we are. We know what we stand for. And we have each other. Never has the love this community has for each other burned brighter, felt stronger, more courageous, or more unshakable to me than it has this week.

We are here for each other. Here to make sure the torch of love, service, and liberty we honor in this church burns even brighter in a world that has felt for too many eclipsed by darkness and swallowed up in fear. We are here as we have been for 135 years, to be a place of belonging.

St. Martin’s is, and always will be, a safe place. Because while we have no idea of what is coming, we know it will be different from everything we have known before. When someone says to me “I’m so afraid because I tick every box of those they are coming after” I tell them they are loved and safe here. When someone asked me if Republicans are welcome here the answer is “Yes.”

And unbeknownst to me, in answering that last question a few days ago, I found myself quoting our gospel this morning before I realized it was the text for St. Martin’s Day when I said as part of my response: “Whatever you do unto the least of these you do unto me.”

I grew up as my brother’s protector. As someone who is developmentally disabled, Mark ticks off every box for “the least of these” by those who measure who’s in and who’s out. But I know that

whatever is good in me is somehow rooted in him. His kindness, his love for all, his non-judgmental presence and his sheer goodness anchors my faith and solidarity with those on the margins. I am more aligned with them now than ever before.

Which brings me to St. Martin. When the sun is shining, the magnificent window lights up this church in pure radiance tames the reality of the rebel St. Martin was.

That's right. A rebel, a rebel who wanted to study Christianity not join the military which horrified his soldier father. Yet in the window he's a Roman soldier. How did that happen? Martin was held in chains until he signed an oath to join at 15. And then along the way he encounters a shivering beggar. He cut his cloak in half and gave it to him. This part you know.

That night Martin has a dream and sees that the beggar wearing his cloak has the face of Jesus. It was a turning point. Martin became baptized, devoting himself to the sick and the poor. But he had to be tricked into becoming a bishop. Back then in the 4th century, bishops were still chosen by the people. Martin was told a sick woman needed him and he went to see her. But when he realized he'd been duped he hid in a shed with geese. They squawked, as geese do, Martin's cover was blown, and here we are today 1600 years later, celebrating him as our patron saint.

There are those who claim to speak for Jesus these days in explaining why we are where we are.

I let Jesus speak for himself.

"Whatever you do unto the last of these, you do unto me." This has nothing to do with politics. But it has everything to do with Jesus.

The church has tamed Jesus. But he was radical. Defiant. Insistent on lifting up the poor, the marginalized, the outcast, the sinner, the prisoner, the broken-hearted.

With tears in her eyes, a parishioner said at the service we held here the day after the election, "Now I realize in a way I hadn't before how *hard* it was for Jesus."

With stunning clarity, our texts this morning proclaim our truth.

The prophet Isaiah speaking over 3 thousand years ago:

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry

and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your needs in parched places and make your bones strong...
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach...

Psalm 15 affirms that those who will abide with God and dwell with him are:

Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right
and speak the truth from their heart;
who do not slander with their tongue
and do no evil to their friends
nor heap shame upon their neighbors...

More than once this week I heard: "I know I'm supposed to love my neighbor, but, right now...."

Right now you are where you are. Faith demands our authenticity if it's to mean anything. Robots don't need Jesus but we messy, complicated, humans do. We are where we are and we're all in different places. That is precisely why we need to be in community. Love will always be our goal, our destination. But for now, the first step in that direction is to "render to no one evil for evil."

Start where you are and do what you can. Love more. Pray harder. Sing louder. Listen deeply. Give more. Never surrender your joy. Revel in creation. Insist on beauty. Choose hope.

And keep coming here because we can do all this together. With Mary, Martin, and Jesus, we will love each other, trust each other, and belong to each other more than we have before and carry that love out into our world.

After our service on Wednesday evening a newer member of our parish reached out a few days later to express her gratitude. She said it had been hard to find the words and she didn't want to sound stupid. She wrote:

I am struck by the contrast between the anger that is only capable of violence and cruelty, and the anger that turns its mighty energy to creating beauty in the world.

I marvel at the latter – especially in those often targeted by the first-- and was humbled and challenged by the service at St. Martin's on Wednesday night.

Her words, in no way stupid, remind us that humbled, challenged, or broken, when we stand together, we have a mighty energy with which to transform our world.

May we, with the "Yes" of Mary do something bold for love in God's name. May we, in the name of Martin, cut the cloak of whatever privilege we wear to shelter those in desperate need. And in the name of Jesus, may we carry the chalice of his liberating, life giving love out into the world, especially to those targeted by hate, cruelty, or fear.

AMEN