



Jacob's Ladder



A NEWSLETTER OF OXFORD FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Rev. Sapada Thomas, Pastor

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What Would Dr. King Think of America Today?

by Clarence H. Franklin



Good Morning Oxford First Family.

On the eve of his national holiday, I was asked to say a few words about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The first thing that came to my mind was if Dr. King was alive today, what would he think of where the United States of America is right now? In an attempt to answer this question, we will look to the words of his famous "I Have a Dream," speech, not the part about the Dream but the very beginning, where he said these words:

"In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is

obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

"But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice."

Clearly this country has come a long way since Dr. King penned those words, but are we any closer to actually cashing that check as a people today? Yes, we have made great strides. For example, we now have more people of color representing us in the local and national houses of government than ever

before, including our first Black President, Barack Obama. Yet that one event, more than anything else ignited a white backlash that led to the growth and formation of white nationalist groups all over the country and to the election of Donald Trump as President. Racists could now come out and claim that their opposition to black progress is based on politics not race. President Trump fanned the flames of racism, reminiscent of what was seen at the end of Reconstruction at the close of the 19th century. Make no mistake about it, racism is still at the heart of everything in this country, especially those insurrectionists that laid siege to the Capitol last week, talking about taking *their* country back. Nowhere was racism more evident than when we saw how that overwhelmingly white mob was treated by the police compared to how they treated Black Live Matters peaceful protesters last year. When all that was going down, my son asked me how is possible that people could just break into the Capitol and take it over like that? My only response was “*They’re white.*” We couldn’t ask for a better example of *white privilege* than that. Clearly we as a people are not quite to point where we can cash that check just yet.

But what would King have to say about the church today? Let’s look at an excerpt from his famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail addressed to the church:

“I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings, I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: ‘What kind of people

worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?’

“Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.

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“But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.”

Today, Dr. King would be the first to point out that the church has abrogated its responsibility to be the hands of God in the world today. It could be argued that much of the church has completely lost its direction

when you consider that 81% of white evangelicals unequivocally support President Trump, who is perhaps the most ungodly person we have ever seen. I would be willing to bet, if I was a betting man, that the majority of those thugs that took over the Capitol were regular church goers who considered themselves Christians. Today the church is more about what it stands against instead of what it stands for. As we remember and honor Dr. King today, let us be reminded that while he would note that much progress has been made, he would also point out that progress is not completion, and that a lot of work still needs to be done. Unfortunately, we as a people are still trying to cash that check. Think on these things as we celebrate Dr. King's legacy today, tomorrow and throughout the year.

Thank you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This presentation was delivered on Sunday, January 17, 2021 as part of Oxford First UMC's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Celebration.



Sunday, February 7, 2021
12:30 P.M.

Oxford First UMC invites you to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion on Sunday, February 7th in a drive thru communion beginning at 12:30PM. As a

participant, you will enter the parking lot at the main entrance and then proceed toward the portico. We will use the self-contained communion elements with the juice and wafer in a sealed package. We will have a gluten free option available. We ask that no one will get out of their cars. You will pull up, we will hand you the communion elements and then have a short prayer for you. We would ask that not everyone come right at 12:30PM but try to spread it out to reduce the chance of a major traffic jam.

Oxford First UMC Board of Trustees Meeting

Sunday, February 7, 2021
1:30 P.M.

All trustees are requested to attend this very important meeting. Everyone is asked to please wear masks and practice social distancing.

From the Pastor's Desk

"You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you."
—PSALM 86:5 (NIV)

I wanted to invite you to read the verse and reflect on what it says to you in your current context this day. God's word is powerful and speaks to us in our own unique way... wherever we are in life.

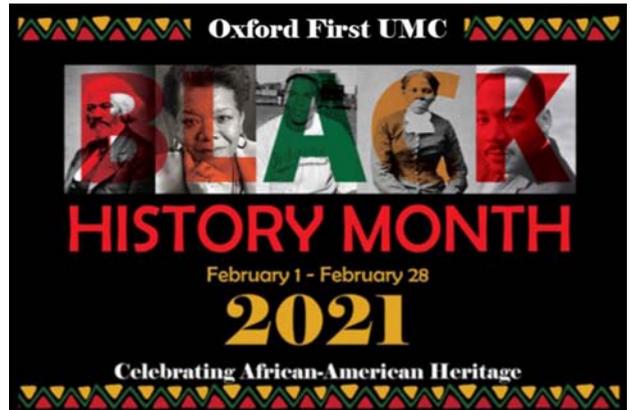
God bless and Love you,
Pastor Sapada Thomas



Due to COVID precautions, Ash Wednesday will look different at Oxford First UMC this year. We will hold a drive-through service at the church on Wednesday, February 7th

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beginning at 6:00P.M. As it is the first day of Lent, many Christians begin Ash Wednesday by marking a Lenten calendar, praying a Lenten daily devotional, and making a Lenten sacrifice that they will not partake of until the arrival of Easter. Call the church at 662-234-2943 for more information.



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