



Prayer Service for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Note: The italicized sections below are stanzas of the Civil Rights hymn, “We Shall Overcome.”.

Leader: We thank you, O Lord, for the leadership and vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the struggle for justice and peace for all human beings. Help us listen with our hearts to his words. Help us sing out with conviction that, with Your grace, we will help overcome the structures of sin that separate people.

Reader 1: “I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism. Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. To return hate for hate does nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Someone must have sense enough and religion enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil, and this can only be done through love.”¹

*All: The Lord will see us through
The Lord will see us through
The Lord will see us through some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
The Lord will see us some day*

Reader 2: “I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant.”²

Reader 3: “This faith can give us courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. When our days become dreary with low hovering clouds and our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, we will know that we are living in the creative turmoil of a genuine civilization struggling to be born.”³

*All: The truth shall make us free
The truth shall make us free
The truth shall make us free some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
The truth shall make us free some day*

Reader 4: “It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.”⁴

Reader 5: “I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor. I choose to give my life for the hungry. I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. I choose to live for and with those who find themselves seeing life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit sign. This is the way I’m going. If it means suffering a little bit, I’m going that way. If it means sacrificing, I’m going that way. If it means dying for them, I’m going that way, because I heard a voice saying, ‘Do something for others.’”⁵

*All: We’ll walk hand in hand
We’ll walk hand in hand
We’ll walk hand in hand some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We’ll walk hand in hand some day*

Reader 6: “Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.”⁶

*All: We will live in Faith
We will live in Faith
We will live in Faith today
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We will live in Faith today*

Reader 7: “Now let me say that the next thing we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth and good will toward men is the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life. Every person is somebody because they are a child of God . . . And when we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won’t exploit people, we won’t trample people with the iron feet of oppression, we won’t kill anybody.”⁷

*All: We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace
We shall lie in peace some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall live in peace some day*

Leader: Let us renew our commitment to live in peace and work for justice:

All: O God, grant us the courage and strength to live out our commitment to create a world in which peace flourishes and “justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

Amen.

*Adapted from Amos 5:24

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*. Edited by Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron and Kieran Taylor. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

² Nobel Prize acceptance speech, *December 10, 1964 in Oslo, Norway*

³ Nobel Prize acceptance speech, *December 10, 1964 in Oslo, Norway*

⁴ Rev. Martin Luther King, “A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” 1967

⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. by Clayborne Carson (New York: Time Warner Co., 1998).

⁶ I’ve Been to the Mountaintop. *In support of the striking sanitation workers at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tenn., on April 3, 1968*

⁷ Rev. Martin Luther King, “A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” 1967