**1-18-21 DEVOTIONAL How Do We, as Christians, Respond to Violence?**

Today is MARTIN LUTHER KING day and while COVID has forced changes in the way we remember this great man, I want to encourage everyone in the WINNSBORO area to please drive thru our MLK Park at Connie Mae and Elm Street downtown, and do something GOOD … Pastor Greg Duffy and the HYPE GROUP (Helping Young People Succeed), are having a CHILI DRIVE THRU FUNDRAISER from 11 – 2 so let’s show our support for the love and unity this community has for each other!

There has been NO ONE in our history that believed in justice and PEACE more than Martin Luther King and we need this now more than ever! In the mid-50’s and early 60’s, King became ***synonymous*** with nonviolent direct action as he worked to overturn segregation and racism across the southern United States. The civil rights movement formed the guidebook for a new era of protest whether it was responding to wars or protesting an unpopular administration at home … his legacy of moral victory leading to actual **change** has been borne out time and again.

King wrote “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue, it seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

What has happened in our country that we have forgotten that burning, and looting, and defunding police and breaking into the capitol where people DIED is OK?? And what are we called to do, as followers of Christ, in a moment like this? I want to share a note from a Pastor I respect, Dyan Dietz, and I was touched by her words:

“What are we to do as Christians in a moment like this? That is the question that I have been asking myself. Whether I turn on Fox News or CNN the message is the same, “This is what we have warned you about…see how evil and destructive those on the other side have become…” I hear their voices, filled with arrogance and self-righteousness, as they call for unity and at the same time pour gasoline on a house in flames.

Who are we to believe? Where is the truth? Who can we trust, when it appears that we have all allowed ourselves to be brainwashed by the voices of our own choosing?

Jesus called himself the good shepherd. He said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” He used this illustration because, at the time, it was common for sheep from different flocks to graze together on occasion, allowing the shepherds to enjoy each other’s company. When they were together, the sheep would mingle, sharing the same pasture. But when the time came for the shepherds to go their own way, they would call to their sheep, and the sheep would follow their shepherd, because they knew, and recognized, the shepherd’s voice.

If you are a Christian, **Jesus** is your shepherd. If you listen, you **will** hear his voice.

**His** is the voice that cried from the cross, ‘forgive them Father, they know not what they do.”

**His** is the voice that calls each one of us to a life of self-examination, humility, repentance, mercy, and grace.

**His** is the voice that calls us to love one another as he has loved us, and to wash one-another’s feet.

**His** is the voice that says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

This is not the voice I hear when I turn on CNN. Neither is it the voice I hear when I turn on Fox News. But it ***is*** a voice that I hear when I listen for it. If you listen, you will hear it too. And if you belong to Christ, you will recognize it. It is a voice that is calling us back to our first love…and to a way of life that bears witness to a God who loved us so much that he sent his own son to save us.”

On this Martin Luther King Day, let us LISTEN for the voice of the Shepherd and PRAY that senseless violence is defeated, and ALL voices can be heard and respected.

Pastor Debbie Lyons