

## Centering / Call to be Fully Present

One of Martin Luther King's most memorable speeches was actually a letter that he wrote while he was in a jail in Birmingham, Alabama. Not for the first time, he had pushed the tolerance of the police and government for equal treatment of black citizens farther than they were ready to accept. He and the people who demonstrated with him had clearly broken the law. Even some of his allies—white people, religious leaders, who had stood with him and supported his goals—wondered if he was moving too fast, if it wouldn't be better to go slower and wait for people to come to change in their own time.

Dr. King's letter back to them said,

*In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed. I have longed to hear white ministers say, desegregate because integration is morally right, because the Negro is your brother. In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted on black people, I have watched whit churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion.*

*The early Christians were often 'disturbers of the peace' and 'outside agitators'. But things are different now. The contemporary church is so often today a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo.*

*The judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club.*

Ouch.

It's hard to hear criticism. No doubt those white allies of Dr. King rushed to defend their concerns and their actions. As we would. As we do.

The voice of prophets, the voice of a God who loves us, can sound stern and sometimes even harsh when it reminds us that we have gone off-track, lost our way.

In this moment of silence, I invite you to hear that voice too. Where have you lost your way? Where have we, together, lost our way? What is the voice that is calling us to a different path, to be people of faith and courage and boldness?

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You will pass through deep waters, God says, but I will be with you.  
The river won't sweep over you; the fire that burns around you will not consume you.  
I am the one who created you, the one who formed you.  
And then I came and found you again. I will not let you go.  
I have called you by name; you are mine.