

The Man, the Dream, the Movement

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By Clyde Grubbs and Mary Jane Holden  
Adapted by Rev. Linda Simmons

Prelude: *Amazing Grace*  
Jim Brickman

Rev. Linda: Welcome

Good Morning! Welcome to this community of caring, and of justice-seekers. Many of the people around you found a spiritual home here after searching for a place that's caring and welcoming of our individual gifts. What we share here is not an unchanging dogma, but an affirmation that we are called to be agents of love and justice, and to build a world where everyone is cherished for who they are. Doing that requires us— we who have privilege—to use our voices, our courage, and our resources to dismantle oppression in all its forms.

Chalice Lighting: Cinda Gaynor

We kindle a flame of illuminating the Holy in each.

This flame is mine, as well as yours.

We are brought together on this day, called to growth, to expansion, and justice.

What does your heart know while beholding this holy fire?

Hymn: #348 Guide My Feet

PART 1: Second-Class Status

Rev. Linda: It's a privilege to present this service today, written by Rev. Clyde Grubbs and Mary Jane Holden. You're about to hear the story of the Civil Rights movement – a story that needs to be told, over and over, so that we remember its people and its principles.

But it's not a comfortable story... nor should it be. In fact, I wish you discomfort as the story and its pictures unfold. I wish you anger and unrest. I wish you Holy Agitation. I wish for all of us to leave this sanctuary at the end of the hour with fresh honor and appreciation for the mighty struggle that took place in our country in the 1960s – and for the ways that the struggle continues today.

In order to understand the power and meaning of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., we have to go back in history, and explain who Jim Crow was.

Reader 1, Val: Jim Crow was a character in the minstrel shows that white Americans flocked to in the middle of the 19th century. The shows were full of music and dancing clowns and skits. Jim Crow was a black-faced actor, and the comedy was to depict African Americans as stupid, and people to be made fun of.

Reader 2, Mitch: For many white Americans, Jim Crow defined what real African Americans were supposed to be like. So, in wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction, when the white power structure of the Southern States tried to find a way to continue the oppression of now-free African Americans and instituted a group of laws putting African Americans in second class status, they named those laws after the clown character Jim Crow.

Rev. Linda: Jim Crow laws kept Black people in separate schools and in menial jobs. They effectively denied the African American people the right to vote by requiring that they take a test on the US Constitution — which was waived for white people. The examiners always found that the African Americans failed the test. There was also a tax on voting in some jurisdictions which kept poor voters, which African Americans most often were, off the voter lists.

Reader 1, Val: One of the most humiliating Jim Crow laws was the racial segregation of public transportation. White folks rode in the front of the bus and Black folks rode in the back. There were little signs along the bus aisle that indicated White or Black. These signs could be flipped, and African Americans told to stand, if the White section filled up.

Reader 2, Mitch: The African American people struggled against Jim Crow laws since their inception, but in 1954 the Supreme Court made a landmark decision. In *Brown versus the Board of Education*, the Court made it clear that laws setting up separate schools were unconstitutional; separate schools were inherently unequal and they therefore violated the equal protection clause of the constitution.

It was clear that *Brown versus Board of Education* meant an end to all forms of racial segregation in public facilities... but local Jim Crow laws would need to overcome one by one.

Children's Story: What is Equality, RE Children and Leyah Jensen

Anthem *This Little Light of Mine* UU Meeting Hosue Choir  
Mark Patterson

Rev. Linda: Joys and Concerns

The sharing of joys and sorrows is a time when this beloved community creates room for those among us who need to grieve, or to celebrate a happiness.

Rev. Linda: Spoken Meditation/Prayer: The Promise and the Practice, by Connie Simon;  
Adapted by Rev. Linda

Spirit of Life and Love, God of Many Names,  
we gather in awareness of the opportunity before us as Unitarian Universalists.  
We have been given many chances before today to heal the wounds of the racism and oppression that have beset our denomination for many years,  
and held us back from realizing the inherent worth and dignity of all Unitarian Universalists.  
We have made some progress but we still have a long way to go.  
We have an opportunity today to renew our commitment to this work and we embrace it fully and thankfully. We come together to listen to the voices of those whose contributions to our faith

have been neglected for far too long. We welcome them home into a new Unitarian Universalism – into a faith that embraces and includes all of us... and brings us closer to the Beloved Community of which we dream.

We know we have much work to do; that everyone has a role to play if we are to live fully into our principles and achieve our highest aspirations.

We pray for healing of the wounds of the past and present.

We pray for open hearts and minds that we may envision what is possible.

We pray for the courage not only to speak up, but also to listen, even when the words are hard to hear.

We pray for compassion and understanding.

We pray for resilience and determination and for the fearlessness to take risks, to make mistakes and to keep trying.

In gratitude for the opportunities we have been given and the promise of what we can achieve together... and in the name of all that is holy, we say amen.

Hymn: #169 We Shall Overcome

PART 2: Rosa Parks

Reader 3, Leyah: It began with Rosa Parks.

Reader 4, RE Kids: Not really. It began long before then, in a hundred different places, in a hundred different ways.

Reader 5, Jim: It began in Africa. It began when the first slaves were brought to America. It began with the Proclamation, with the Civil War, and the reconstruction, with all those broken promises.

Reader 3, Leyah: But for the public person we remember today – for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the world he changed – you could say it began with Rosa Parks.

Reader 6, Kat: December 1, 1955. Montgomery, Alabama. Bus Number 2857. Rosa Parks, 42 years old, who sitting in the front row of the black-only bus seats. A bus driver named Jimmy Blake told this little slip of a colored woman to get up out of her seat so a white man could sit down.

Reader 4, RE Kids: And Rosa Parks said no. No, I will not. I am cold and I'm tired and I got here first. I'm sitting.

Reader 5, Jim: While she waited Jimmy Blake went to call the police. She got arrested and hauled away.

Reader 3, Leyah: Ms. Parks wasn't the first to protest bus segregation. Irene Morgan had done the same thing nine years before, and Sarah Keyes had done it just a few months earlier. The U.S. Supreme Court had already said she didn't have to move. She had rights.

Reader 4, RE Kids: But this time somebody noticed. In fact, everybody noticed. That's how the Birmingham Bus Boycott began and how Martin Luther King, Jr. found her.

Reader 6, Kat: There's no denying it: Rosa Parks was making a point and she knew it. She was secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or N-double-ACP. When she said no to Jimmy Blake, she was already a worker for civil rights and racial equality. But still: this was the moment. She was tired of giving in, and she wasn't going to do it anymore. And she suffered for it. She lost her job as a seamstress in a local department store. But she started a movement.

Reader 5, Jim: E.D. Nixon, president of the local N-double-ACP, wanted Rosa Parks' arrest to be a test case, so that Montgomery's Black citizens could challenge the city's segregationist laws. He and the other leaders of the movement had actually been waiting for a case like this – for an act of injustice that would galvanize the Black community and drive them into action.

Reader 3, Leyah: After Rosa Parks was arrested, E.D. Nixon organized a meeting of local Rev. Lindas at home church of a young Rev. Linda, Martin Luther King, Jr. A little later on, King was elected to lead the boycott – mainly because he was new in town and unknown, and the 'city fathers' of Montgomery hadn't had a chance to intimidate him. E.D. Nixon actually had to push Rev. King to get him to take the job, but he did it – finally – and the world started to change.

Reader 4, RE Kids: The night of Rosa Parks' arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, head of the Women's Political Council, printed and circulated a flyer throughout Montgomery's Black community:

Rev. Linda: "Another woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down. This has to be stopped. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother. This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday!"

Reader 6, Kat: That was December 2nd. On December 3rd, almost no Black people rode the busses in Montgomery, Alabama. Instead, boycotters just stayed home, or organized carpools. Some white housewives even drove their Black domestic servants to work – whether they were sympathetic to the cause, or just wanted to not have their servants miss a day at work.

Reader 4, RE Kids: Dr. King said it best himself: "A miracle has taken place."

Reader 5, Jim: The city didn't like that; they pressured local insurance companies to stop insuring cars used in carpools. So the boycott leaders arranged policies with Lloyds of London.

Reader 3, Leyah Black taxi drivers helped, too. They charged their Black fares only ten cents for a ride — the same price as a bus ride. And when the city officials heard about that, they passed a law saying it was illegal to charge a rider less than 45 cents. That didn't stop it. It just got bigger.

Reader 4, RE Kids: People started riding bicycles. They started walking. They even rode mules and horse-drawn buggies. And across the country, Black churches raised money to support the boycott. They even collected shoes to replace the worn-out footwear of Montgomery's Black citizens.

Reader 6, Kat: The White Citizens Council – fought back. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and Ralph Abernathy's houses were firebombed. So were four Black Baptist churches. Boycotters were attacked and beaten all over town. Finally, the city of Montgomery hauled out a law passed way back in 1921 and started arresting protesters for "hindering a bus"...and one of those arrested was King. He ended up spending two weeks in prison and becoming a national celebrity. Much later, Dr. King said:

Reader 4, RE Kids: "I was proud of my crime. It was the crime of joining my people in a nonviolent protest against injustice."

Reader 5, Jim: The Montgomery bus boycott was an eleven-month mass protest that ended with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that public bus segregation is unconstitutional. Dr. King saw it was about much more than that. It wasn't just about a Black woman in Montgomery getting pushed around. It wasn't just about one law in one city. It was about the rights of all Black people. It was time to stand up. King said:

Rev. Linda: "In all of our actions we must stick together. Unity is the great need of the hour, and if we are united we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve."

Reader 3, Leyah: By the way, Rosa Parks came out okay. She was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, and there's a statue of her in the National Statuary Hall. When she died, she lay in honor in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C. — only the third private citizen to lie in honor in the Rotunda. Rosa Parks.

### PART 3: Martin Luther King, Jr. and His Dream

Rev. Linda: By 1963, the civil rights movement had grown into a national movement. There had been sit-ins at lunch counters, voter registration drives, freedom rides on interstate buses, and many school districts had accepted school desegregation. But there was fierce resistance in a number of states, including Alabama. Governor George Wallace and the officials in a number of locales vowed to resist even in the face of court decisions and growing federal pressure.

Wallace had just become Governor of Alabama; his inaugural speech contained these words:

In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.

Wallace would be proven wrong, but it took several years of determined effort to overcome Alabama White Supremacist Power Structure.

Reader 7, Carl: As now-Congressman John Lewis said:

“Our goal in Birmingham was larger than ending segregation in one Southern city. It was our hope that our efforts in Birmingham would dramatize the fight and determination of African-American citizens in all the Southern states and that we would force the Kennedy administration to draft and push through Congress a comprehensive Civil Rights Act, outlawing segregation and racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment and education.”

Reader 9, Emily: King talked endlessly about the philosophy of nonviolence and its methods, and gathered volunteers for lunch counter sit-ins, marches on city halls, a boycott of downtown merchants. The number of volunteers increased every day. Now there were kneel-ins at churches, sit-ins at the library, and a march on the county building to mark the opening of a voter registration drive.

Rev. Linda: On April 10th, the city government got a court injunction ordering an end to all protests. But Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC disobeyed the court order. King declared:

Reader 7, Carl: “We cannot in all good conscience obey such an injunction which is an unjust, undemocratic and unconstitutional misuse of the legal process.”

Reader 8, Elisabeth: King himself knew he would be arrested if he kept on going... and he worried about that. They were running out of money, and Dr. King was good at fund-raising. He wondered if he could do more on the outside than on the inside. But finally, he decided: he had to go to jail in Birmingham. “Friends,” he said:

Reader 9, Emily: “I have to make a faith act. I don't know what will happen or what the outcome will be. I don't know where the money will come from.”

Reader 7, Carl: But on April 12th, he got himself arrested for violating the court order, and he was slammed into solitary confinement.

Reader 8, Elisabeth: He wasn't even allowed to call his wife Coretta, who was home recovering from giving birth. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy had to put pressure on the judges, personally, just so Dr. King could call home.

Reader 9, Emily: Finally, after a huge movement, all across the country, just to raise the money, King was released on April 19, 1963.

Rev. Linda: During his time in jail, in his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail, King wrote:

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea.

Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.”

Reader 7, Carl: But change didn't happen just because he was released from jail. There had to be a way to keep the pressure up, to make the civil rights movement a truly national event...

Reader 9, Emily: And that's when the children came. The grown-ups in the movement wanted to keep up the pressure. They really wanted things to change. So they asked high school students to get involved in the demonstrations.

Reader 8, Elisabeth: They had no idea what a lion they were releasing.

Reader 9, Emily: On May 2, barely two weeks after King's release, more than a thousand Black children came together to protest in Birmingham, Alabama.

Nine hundred of them were arrested. The next day, nearly two thousand five hundred more took their place.

Musician starts to play “We Shall Overcome”

Reader 7, Carl: And Bull Connor ordered firefighters to turn their hoses on the protesters.

Reader 8, Elisabeth: He told police officers to let their dogs loose and chase those children down.

Reader 9, Emily: In pictures that were broadcast and printed all over the country, nonviolence protesters were seen being beaten by angry police officers. Children were driven to the ground.

Reader 8, Elisabeth: John Lewis said, “We didn't fully comprehend at first what was happening. We were witnessing police violence and brutality Birmingham-style. Unfortunately for Bull Connor, so was the rest of the world.”

Rev. Linda: Agreements started to be made: pledges for the desegregation of public accommodations, for more fair hiring practices, for better communication between black and white leaders.

Reader 7, Carl: The home of Dr. King's brother was bombed; another bomb was planted near the motel where King was staying. A bomb went off on Sunday at 9:45 a.m. at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and killed four little girls.

Reader 9, Emily: It killed four little girls at Sunday School. It was a national issue now. It was time for everyone – young and old, rich and poor – to join in solidarity together.

Reader 8, Elisabeth: On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 demonstrators showed up in Washington D.C. and marched to the Lincoln Memorial. That's where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the speech that everyone remembers — the speech about his dream that became everyone's dream.

Call to Offering, Rev. Linda

Offertory *Steal Away*

trad. African American Spiritual

#### PART 4: The Movement

Rev. Linda: Martin Luther King Jr. did not ask to be a leader of the Civil Rights movement. The Montgomery N-double A-CP was looking for a spokesperson and Martin Luther King, Jr. was asked to speak on their behalf. The Bus Boycott made national news, and the young Rev. Linda became a national figure. He had read about Gandhi in college and had training in non violent resistance, but lead a mass movement based on those principles? That was a new thing.

Reader 1, Val: Over the course of the eleven years after Montgomery Martin Luther King, Jr. became a world figure, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was also expanding his vision: how to achieve real equality, real freedom for African Americans. He began to see that this would go beyond civil rights; that is: equal legal rights.

Reader 2, Mitch: He began to see that the problem was unequal distribution of wealth: that white, Asian, Latino, Native American, and African Americans were all suffering together in a system that perpetuated inequality and poverty. In the last days of his life he became critical of the Corporate Power Structure and of U.S. foreign policy.

Rev. Linda: He made plans to join the civil rights movement with the labor movement in what he described as a Poor People's Movement. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot in Memphis, Tennessee on Tuesday April 4<sup>th</sup> 1968. He was there to support the Sanitation Workers Strike, a strike of white workers and African American workers who had united in the Deep South for their rights to organization and decent wages.

Reader 1, Val: The concrete results of the movement changed the world. The Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Voting Rights Act of 1965. They led directly to the enfranchisement of African Americans, and directly to the Inauguration Day the country celebrated five years ago tomorrow, when our country's first African-American president took office.

Reader 2, Mitch: But in the final days of his life, Dr. King saw his mission widen even more. As the War in Vietnam grew deeper and wider – as thousands and thousands of black people and white people and Asian people on both sides of the war continued to die – he saw that the quest for civil rights was a quest for human rights – that it was about the oppression of all people, of every race, all around the world.

Rev. Linda: Today we honor Martin Luther King, Jr.

Reader 1, Val: We give thanks for the movement that changed the world for the better...and continues to change it today.

Reader 2, Mitch: And we remind ourselves that whatever color we are, wherever we come from, whoever we are, this is our movement, too.

Rev. Linda: We are all part of the plan. We are all citizens of the world.

At the beginning of our service today, I wished you discomfort... unrest... Holy Agitation. How will we move forward today, into the continuing struggle to recognize the racism/culture in which all of our institutions and all Americans are steeped?

Our closing hymn is known as the Black National Anthem.

Hymn #149 *Lift Every Voice and Sing*

Benediction

Chalice Extinguishing: Cesar Gianella

**Carry the flame of peace and love until we meet again**

Postlude *The Lonesome Road*

trad. African American Spiritual