

Sermon January 18, 2026

Children's Sermon: The Brave Love of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Prop Idea: A "Dream Jar" (empty) and various colorful strips of paper, or a single bright flashlight.

1. The Opening Question (Active Wonder)

"Good morning, everyone! Today we are celebrating a very special person named Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was a leader, a preacher, and a person who had a giant 'Holy Imagination.'

Does anyone know what a 'dream' is? (Wait for answers). Usually, we dream when we're asleep. But Dr. King had a dream while he was wide awake. He dreamed of a world that was as fair and as kind as God's love."

2. The Problem (Inclusion & Belonging)

"When Dr. King was alive, there were some very mean and unfair rules called 'segregation.' These rules tried to say that people were different or 'less than' because of the color of their skin. They couldn't go to the same schools or even sit on the same parts of the bus.

Does that sound like it fits our value that everyone belongs? (Wait for 'No'). You're right. It was a rule based on fear, not on love. Dr. King knew that every single person has a 'Divine Light' inside them, no matter what they look like."

3. The Action (The Radical Jesus)

"Dr. King followed the way of Jesus. Jesus taught us that if we see something unfair, we don't just walk past it. We use our voices and our bodies to help fix it.

But here is the most important part: Dr. King said we have to fight unfairness with Brave Love. He didn't use his fists or mean words. He used 'Non-violence.' He taught people to march together, to sing

together, and to stand up for what is right even when it's scary. That is what it means to be a peacemaker."

4. The Activity: Building the Beloved Community

"Dr. King called his dream the 'Beloved Community.' It's a place where everyone has enough to eat, everyone has a safe home, and everyone is treated with respect.

(Hold up the Dream Jar or strips of paper).

I want you to think about one thing that would make our world more like the 'Beloved Community.' Maybe it's making sure every kid has a warm coat, or making sure no one is ever teased for being different. If you have an idea, you can whisper it to the person next to you, or just hold it in your heart."

5. The Closing Prayer (Spiritual Autonomy)

"Let's pray together. You can repeat after me:

Dear God/Spirit of Love,

Thank you for Dr. King.

Thank you for his big, brave dream.

Help us to be brave, too.

Help us to use our voices for justice,

And our hearts for love.

Amen."

John 1:29-42

In today's gospel reading, we hear John's version of the call of the first disciples... a version that is very different from the other gospels. John the Baptist declares that Jesus is the Son of God. That is enough for two of his own disciples., who decide to follow Jesus. One of them, Andrew, later gets his brother Simon to join them. Simon, who Jesus renames Cephus, Peter, which means the Rock.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

A Call to Relationship

A little baby boy named Howard Thurman was born in 1899 in Daytona, Florida. Growing up in a time of segregation and the Jim Crow south, there were few options open to him. Schools for black children only offered classes through seventh grade. There were no high schools for black youth, because they did not have the ability to complete 8th grade or take the required exam to be promoted to high school. But, Howard's seventh grade teacher saw something special in him. He offered to homeschool Howard. He completed the work and passed the test to be promoted to high school., but the closest high school for black students was a hundred of miles away. A relative in Jacksonville offered to take him in, so he could attend school there. He packed up his trunk, which was so old that the handle had fallen off, but he tied it up with a rope and headed to the train station. His journey almost ended there. The station master told him that he could not take his trunk because they could not put a shipping tag on the handle. His only other choice was to ship it separately, which was expensive. Sadly, he dragged his trunk off the platform, sat down and cried.

"Why are you crying?" he heard the voice say. He looked up to see a stranger. He blurted out the story with tear streaming down his face. "if you're trying to get out of town to get an education, the least I can do is help you." He picked up the trunk, pulled money out of his pocket and paid the stationmaster to ship the trunk to Jacksonville. Howard Thurman went on to high school and beyond... he became a gifted minister, poet and voice for justice. His views on non-violent resistance inspired his own student, Martin Luther King Jr, whose life and legacy we remember this weekend.

Because one man, whose name has been lost to history, intervened, young Howard Thurman learned that we are never truly alone. We experience God's presence in unexpected ways through the most unexpected people.

Look back at your own lives and see if you can remember a moment like this, when unexpected Grace changed your life.

Today, we hear that God promises to be our support, and longs for us to know of God's presence.

God called us before we were born, named us... knew us... and still knows us today. God has been with us from the beginning and stays with us until the bitter end. God is with us, even when we are not aware of God's presence. 24 hours a day, we are never truly alone.

Part of our journey of faith is recognizing those moments when we become suddenly aware of God's presence in our midst, hold tight to those moments of revelation and then go out and sharing the Good News.

God longs for us to pay attention and give voice to God's loving presence in our lives. Isaiah tells us of a God who knows us better than anyone, before we are even born. John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the one who takes away sin and washes us clean. Andrew tells his friends that he found the chosen one promised by scripture.

God shows up in our lives in different ways and we use different words, but we can be sure of one thing: God comes to us and never leaves us alone.

- ♥ Maybe like John the Baptist, in a moment of epiphany, you have come to know Jesus as the one who takes away, takes away guilt or shame or burdens too heavy to carry.
- ♥ Maybe like the Andrew you have come to know Jesus through religious teachings and to know yourself to be called into the sacred narrative that in Christ, God continues to love and transform the world. You have a sense because it has been

revealed to you, that your life has a mission and a purpose tied up in the Good News.

- ♥ Maybe like the psalmist, you have endured unspeakable grief and times of unbelief and have felt a strength, a power beyond your own, sustain you and lift you up.

God's love comes when we are alone or in a crowded room. It surrounds us in times of sorrow or joy; in the dark of night or standing under the rays of a rainbow. God is present in times of prayer or in the touch of hand. Those times when we are suddenly reminded that we are not alone, because God longs to be a part of our lives.

But we can not stay and experience God's presence alone. Once we hear God's calling voice, we are pushed to turn to our siblings.... To share the Good News with them too.

As Jesus walks down the road, two people decide to follow him. Once they are aware of God's presence among them, they cannot sit still or stay at home. They need to follow and learn more. They devote the rest of their lives, not only to following Jesus, but to helping others learn how to recognize God in their midst.

It's not an easy decision. Following Jesus takes risk and can be scary. We need to have Faith for the journey.

Faithfulness to God requires trust. The people of Israel trusted God despite years of suffering. They trusted in God even when it was hard, knowing that God will lift them out of the pit of exile. The earliest disciples trusted John's witness and decided to change direction and follow Jesus. And generations of people like Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr; Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day have put their trust in Jesus.... And followed him. That is what we are called to do as well. We just need to trust, despite the evidence before us, that God's ways will endure.

"I will give you a light", God tells Isaiah, "so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." In Jesus we recognize the light. Its rays spread out and drive the darkness away, allowing us to see the world with new eyes. Opening up the possibility of encountering God each and every day.

And so today, let us remember the words Martin Luther King said almost 60 years ago: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

So let us follow in love and be the light. Amen