

# “Greater are the Things”

John 1:43-51

January 15, 2006

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

## John 1:43-51

<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” <sup>46</sup>Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” <sup>47</sup>When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” <sup>48</sup>Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” <sup>49</sup>Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” <sup>51</sup>And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Prayer.

On the eve  
before his death  
Martin spoke about  
how his life had been claimed  
by Christ for a greater purpose.  
Greater are the things  
you will see and do,  
Martin.

In a failed attempt  
to end his life years earlier  
a would-be assassin  
plunged a knife deep  
into his chest.  
The tip of the blade  
was next to his aorta the x ray revealed  
and it was reported in the papers that  
without repair  
a simple sneeze would take his life.  
Martin reported to the Memphis crowd  
of sanitation workers, friends, and families  
that a ninth-grade white student  
from White Plains High School  
wrote him a note of encouragement  
during his convalescence

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which read, in part:

“I read that if you had sneezed,  
you would have died.  
And I'm simply writing you to say  
that *I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze.*”

Martin had seen greater things  
because he did not sneeze.

Martin understood  
God had spared his life  
for greater things:

- to organize lunch-counter sit-ins in 1960
- to support brothers and sisters in 1962 Albany, Georgia  
to, as he put it, straighten their backs
- to stand non-violently in 1963 Birmingham, Alabama  
when fire hoses could not douse the fire that burned within  
bellies that yearned for an equal share
- to tell America about a dream he had  
a dream of equal opportunity, freedom, and justice  
in Washington, DC in 1963  
when leaders gathered and  
the Civil Rights Bill was passed
- in Selma, and then in Memphis, in 1968  
to stand against injustice and oppression  
according to his  
and our  
baptismal vows.

Greater are the Things  
that Martin had seen  
because God had spared his life  
and claimed him  
for a life of discipleship and ministry.

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God!  
You are the King of Israel!”  
the exuberant Nathanael had responded  
to Philip's invitation to  
“come and see.”

Nathanael responded again,  
this time to the Savior's invitation to  
“follow me.”

Nathanael had seen  
the obvious  
to those of us with a measure of  
faith and hindsight:

that

**Jesus is the Son of God**

and

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## Jesus is the King.

Jesus is more than sinew  
mere mortality  
wrapped in DNA  
consumed with flesh  
and it's carnal desires.  
Jesus is life  
and light  
and wholly divine,  
indivisible from the divinity  
that created and creates  
that breaths and rustles  
from before time  
until after time will cease.

Jesus is the King  
of every earthly kingdom  
and of every heavenly domain.  
By his hand  
the heavens are opened  
and the highway between heaven and earth  
is paved with his blood from the cross  
the forgiveness of sins  
and with the gift of eternal life.  
Angels travel this road  
and one day  
you and I will follow it, too.

“Greater are the things  
you will see, Nathanael”

Jesus says:

“Three years of learning at my feet,  
Three years of observing how I reach out,  
Three years to grow the compassion and grace  
necessary for a life as my disciple.”

Nathanael understood  
that Jesus had greater things  
for him to see  
greater things for him to do  
greater expectations for  
the use of his time and talents:  
a mission and ministry  
that would forever change him  
from an observer  
into a witness  
who would spread that first hand knowledge

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who would spread his example  
one day  
to the ends of the earth.

“I am so glad you did not sneeze,”  
a school girl could have written  
that day to Nathanael.

Greater are the things  
you will see and do.



*Memorial Statue and Marsh Chapel  
at Boston University*

A long haired  
unkempt and seemingly purposeless  
engineering student  
exited the darkened chapel  
on a cold January day in 1981  
stunned by the light of day  
which illuminated the statute  
that lay before him.  
A memorial to Martin  
cut down by an assassin's bullet  
the very next morning  
after his speech  
eerily,

perhaps prophetically  
titled

“I Have Seen the Promised Land”



*Memorial Statue to Martin  
Luther King, Jr. - Outside  
Marsh Chapel at Boston  
University*

Though the memorial statue  
served as a tribute to a beloved  
earth-changing alumni  
to the blinded engineering student  
a question was posed  
causing the deepest rumblings  
ever experience in a  
here-to-fore  
shallow life.  
Greater things were seen  
because Martin did not sneeze.  
“What are you doing?  
What are you doing with your life?”  
the Spirit's voice sounded clear as a bell  
on a cold winter day.  
The thoughts did not fade.  
“Where are you going?  
Where are you going with your life?”  
The hounds of heaven  
had run him down and

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sunk their teeth  
into the unknowing prospect  
and simply would not let go.  
The voice did not go away  
until finally it was understood that  
no response  
would be unacceptable.  
"It looks as if I'm going  
where I least expected,"  
was the only possible reply.  
"Here I am, Lord. Take me."

Twenty-five years later  
that kid  
stands before you  
as a simple parish pastor  
nothing more and nothing less  
than a disciple of Jesus  
struggling to live out my call  
to Love God  
and Love my neighbor  
with the same grace and justice  
given by Jesus to Nathanael  
given by God to Martin  
that is given daily by God  
to me  
to support and sustain Christ's ministry  
in my life.

Greater are the things  
I have seen  
and attempted to show others  
throughout my life and ministry  
because Martin did not sneeze  
because Nathanael heeded his call.  
The keys to the Kingdom  
are given to every disciple of Christ  
we are told.  
I have attempted to use my set of keys  
to open the doors that hold in pain and suffering  
to unlock healing and set free justice  
that I might join with Amos to proclaim  
"Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."  
That I unify my voice with Jesus to announce  
"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the  
poor."

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My friends,  
my question to you this day  
is the same question posed to me  
that day long ago in Boston:  
What are you doing?  
Where are you going?  
It is the same question Jesus asked Nathanael.  
It was the same question Martin asked the crowds  
and reflected upon himself  
the night before he died.

If you don't know where you are going  
then travel with me for a spell.  
Together, let us heed Jesus' call,  
"Come,  
follow me."

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**On this, the eve of Martin Luther King, Jr national holiday, it seems fitting to list below some of the moving quotes from his final sermon, "[I See the Promised Land](#)" delivered April 3, 1968 in Memphis, TN:**

But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars.

Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence in this world; it's non-violence or non-existence.

It means that we've got to stay together.

Secondly, let us keep the issues where they are.

Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and say, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow, the preacher must say with Jesus, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. ... As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain.

we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end.

whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't

ride your back unless it is bent.

I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

The full text of his sermon may be read at:

<http://www.geocities.com/kittycatalien/Zion/I.See.the.Promised.Land.MLK.Jr.040368.pdf>

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