

Reflection & Prayertime: Speak Now

April 12, 2021

First, to our colleagues who observe Ramadan I would like to wish you a very Happy Ramadan. In non-Covid times I usually participate in the Iftar dinner celebrating the end of Ramadan and I have missed that celebration. We are thinking of all who participate in the discipline of fasting and restraint during this season of spiritual discipline.

For those who celebrate Easter, a reading: As we walk through this season of renewal, Easter us, O God. In those places where fear reigns, in those places where we cannot feel your presence, Easter us, O God. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, lungs to breathe in your presence. Easter us, O God, we pray. Amen.

And Scripture from John 20:19-29: When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As God has sent me, so send I you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "we have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me?" Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Last week we focused on how the stone is still rolling from the grave and I posed the question, "how is it still rolling for you?" I mentioned a film that I had seen, "One Night in Miami" and I watched it again this weekend with my daughter so we could discuss it. It's a fictionalized account of a night that Cassius Clay, Malcolm X, NFL player Jim Brown, and singer Sam Cooke spent together on the eve of Cassius Clay winning the Heavyweight Champion of the World boxing title. The conversation (as imagined) spurs them all toward making huge changes in their lives and is truly powerful. Again, I highly recommend it.

What struck me again at this second watching was the date of this meeting in 1965. I was 2 years old at the time and now I'm 58 and the trial of Derek Chauvin in the killing of George Floyd is underway and another young man died yesterday in a police-involved event 10 blocks from where George Floyd died. At the last Voices for Equity training Thursday evening with Marian Vasser there was a heaviness and someone asked the question if anything was really ever going to change. I have to admit that my heart was in that same heavy space of doubt. Doubt just like Thomas had. I'm not trying to bring anyone down here, just saying that some days it seems like the arc is bending toward justice so slightly that the bend is undetectable. Yet Martin Luther King Jr could see it in the midst of what seemed undetectable.

Years ago I stopped to get gas and saw a notice that I had to pay inside first. As I was going in the store, a black man in a blue work shirt with a company logo on it was coming out and held the door for me.

The clerk waved to me and said go ahead and pump, no need to pay first. As I stood outside near the man who was pumping gas across for me I asked him if he had had to pay before pumping and he said yes. I told him they didn't make me pay. I'll never forget that he said, "that's just how it is." Then he flashed a smile and said, "but that's not how it's gonna be." It made me think of the Tony Campolo sermon, "Friday's here, but Sunday's coming."

I went in the gas station and paid and told the clerk that I'd never be back to that station even though it was the closest to my house and to tell his manager so unless I got a phone call that they had stopped discriminating against black people. I never got a phone call so I called and told the manager what happened and why I'd never be back. He just said Ok. I doubt anything changed because of that day and I'm under no illusion that the fact that station is now closed is due in any part to any happening on that day or even related to racial justice. But I do note as I drive by it and see it boarded up that things can and do change and we can and do often influence and change the course of history even when the change is hard to detect and or is long in coming to full fruition.

Last week my mother casually asked me to schedule an appointment with her urologist, Dr Sean Francis, a black man and wonderful doctor. And that would have absolutely never have happened in 1965! As we look all around us at the things that do not change, may we also have eyes to see and hands to touch what is changing, knowing that Jesus understands and accepts our cynicism and our need to fully perceive and sense the change. May our eyes be spiritually peeled to see all the realities around us and may hope that "that's just how it is, but it's not how it's gonna be" guide our steps and fuel our hope. May that hope embolden us to keep speaking now even more boldly. And now let's listen to the song, Speak Now, from the closing credits of "One Night in Miami." And let us rise to that challenge.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvnPEMW1jj8>