

January 18, 2026 – Martin Luther King Jr Day weekend

Here I Am, Lord

Isaiah 49:1b,6b, Psalm 40:4,7-10, John 1:29,35-39

There are a few things that I'm still afraid of – even though my fears are declining.

I'm afraid that I'm not going to be able to get the weight I've regained back off.

I'm afraid of windstorms and black ice, but I try not to show it.

I'm afraid of stairs and heights, many of you know that.

One of my worst fears is losing my eyesight. To that end, I'll be having a cataract removed in the next month or so ... I don't fear that though.

If I had been in Martin Luther King Jr's shoes, I would probably have been afraid. But King didn't show fear. He showed love for his brothers and sisters. He showed love for Jesus Christ. He showed bravery in the face of obstacles.

He spoke out in defense of others, and encouraged everyone to do the same. He was a witness for those who were afraid for their lives, for their possessions and for their well-being. He was a witness for those who deserved an equality they weren't getting.

King encouraged us to love one another as we have been loved by Christ. And this weekend, we remember his brief life and all he accomplished, his ability to speak to a wide range of people with a call that remains vital.

King bore witness for others and showed no fear.

And what is a witness? "One who can give a firsthand account of something seen, heard or experienced; one who furnishes evidence." And biblically, the word witness has the same root as the word martyr – which certainly gives a stronger meaning to the word *witness*. Someone who is willing to put his or her life on the line to tell you what a person believes. That was King.

John was a witness for Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He took seriously his role to tell everyone that Jesus was to come to baptize people with the Holy Spirit. John said that he was a voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord.

I'm looking at a few verses today. Isaiah 49:1b – *The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother's womb, He named me.*

God chose John before he was born, he kicked inside his mother's womb when the pregnant Mary approached! God chose us before we were born. God chose us, not because we are good, or clever, or special – but because He loves us and desires for us to turn toward His Son, Jesus Christ and follow Him. In John 15:16, Jesus says to His followers: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last...*" He chose us to bear fruit!

That should humble us and give us confidence, knowing that all we are called to do will be done by the power of the Holy Spirit, not our own.

Isaiah 49:6b: *I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*

Abraham was chosen to be a blessing to the peoples of the earth. Israel – God's chosen ones, were to be a "*light to the nations!*" Not keep God to themselves!

We are chosen! We are servants! And we are called to tell everyone about the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ; the free gift of amazing love and forgiveness, available to every single person – not just those we deem worthy. We are to be a light to the world – to be a light to the Word. We are chosen to bring God all the glory and to bring as many people as we can into fellowship with God.

In Psalm 40, verses 7-10, David wrote: *Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my*

heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.”

David was ready, he was devoted and he was thrilled to do God’s will. We continue to listen to God’s leading so that we can do God’s will. We put our trust in the things God asks us to do, even when they seem difficult, even when they seem to be against the plans we’ve made for ourselves, even when the world laughs at us. We cry out “Here I am, Lord” and we go where God leads us!

And where we go, we are to open our mouths and share the Good News, even when it might be easier to stay quiet. We are to hold nothing back. We are to let everyone know that God’s love and gift of salvation is offered to them, too. We are to make sure we speak of God’s mercy, grace and constant reliability. We aren’t to hide what God has done for us, what He is for us.

We, as a family, could not exist as a church if we didn’t accept the calling to speak of our Lord and Savior, so we here at First Baptist celebrate God’s faithfulness!

Turning to today’s Gospel passage, John 1:29: *The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* The Lamb of God, whose blood would allow God’s deserved judgment to “pass over” those who believe in Him. The Lamb of God: the once and for all, ultimate sacrifice on behalf of all humanity.

Here is John the Baptist; he has a little following, but he is not afraid to direct his followers to the One who rightfully deserves all the attention, to the One John had been called to prepare the way for.

We, also should not be afraid to direct all the attention to Jesus and away from ourselves. We should not be afraid to give God the glory, to speak of the power of the Holy Spirit, to voluntarily tell the world of our Messiah, Jesus Christ!

Jesus was the real purpose of John the Baptist’s mission, so he is thrilled to see people leave him to follow Jesus! John is filled with joy!

John says: *“This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, for He was before me.’ I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and it remained on Him.”* *“I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”* Without fear, John witnessed for Jesus Christ.

John 1:37-39 reads: *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.*

Probably assuming that Jesus is too busy to talk to them right there and then, they follow and warily ask Him where He is staying. Maybe they’ll have a chance to talk with Him later. But, filled with kindness, Jesus talks with them and invites them to follow Him and so these two men spend the day with Jesus.

Jesus had time for them and He has time for us, too. He cares about our questions and curiosity, our worries and our fears, our joys. He wants to spend time with us and we should crave to spend time with Him.

Just as John was called to be a witness for Jesus – so, too, are we chosen, called to be excited witnesses to God’s love.

Sometimes I’m afraid to be a witness. I thank God each day that I have been given the ability to preach His message in this church. It gives me courage to speak openly about the love I have for Christ, but, more importantly, the love Christ has for me and for each of you – a love so great that Jesus became a sacrifice for our sins.

We have to recognize how frightened many people are of witnessing. Some are frightened of being witnesses for Jesus Christ ... and others are frightened of being on the receiving end of witnesses - of the word “evangelism” and what it has come to represent.

“Have you accepted Jesus?” heard from a domineering brother-in-law or “Do you know where you’re going when you die?” by a well-meaning, but overly intense friend. Too many people have experienced evangelism as coercive and sometimes even threatening, as a dividing device rather than a welcoming one.

Our job as witnesses is best done when we share what we have *noticed*, what we have seen in our lives, what changes have occurred because of Jesus. Intimidation, pleading, coercing – they don't work. Seeing, noticing, how God has worked around us and in our lives and then sharing what we've seen is what is meaningful.

John the Baptist saw the dove descend upon Jesus at His baptism and then he tells others what he saw.

Evangelism should be noticing what God is doing in our lives, sharing it with others, and inviting them to come and see for themselves. It's sharing where we've seen or felt the presence of God in the world and in our lives. Or, if we've had a hard time seeing God today, it might be sharing where we've noticed a need for God – places of hurt, fear, tragedy – and how we want to be God's love for others.

Sharing our faith can be as simple as telling someone why you like coming to church. It can be as simple as telling a friend about a blessing received – a Jesus "sighting." Sharing can be as simple as telling a friend that you felt Jesus' love today. It can be as simple as letting someone know that you got through a rough spot because Jesus walked by your side, lifted you when you were down – maybe in the form of a good friend, a comforting song, a Scripture passage ... or you felt His presence while you were alone.

We invite people all the time. We invite them to go shopping with us. We invite them over for dinner. We invite them to come to a birthday party or a wedding. We invite people to go for a walk or to a baseball game.

But do we invite them to church? Do we invite them to a Bible study? Do we invite them to a time of fellowship? I bet all of us have felt fear at least once when we realized we should be doing some inviting!

We usually find it easy to invite people to do things that we enjoy doing. So, ask yourselves what you like most about our church. And then consider who might enjoy that part, too.

Love the music? Who do you know who would enjoy listening or singing along?

Love the lunches? You must know someone who likes to eat.

Love reading Scripture? Who do you know who likes to read, too?

Now go out and invite someone.

We have to be intentional witnesses to Jesus Christ in our lives. We have to learn to love sharing the saving message of our faith. We have to practice for practice makes perfect... or at least a little bit better and more comfortable!

John the Baptist shared the wonder of what he saw and because of this, Jesus gained His first disciples. Jesus invited them to come and see – to embark upon God's great adventure. I want to be a part in inviting others to join in on the adventure!

From the beginning of time, God has delighted in taking little things and doing something wonderful with them. Our little attempts to share our faith - our tentative, fearful ventures into telling others what we've seen and felt – will be used by God for marvelous things!

Here I am, Lord! Use me!