

**Poems and Meditations from  
Martin Luther King, Jr Sunday  
January 15, 2023**

*On Sunday, January 15, First Church Poet-in-Residence and Deacon, Jean Dany Joachim, convened several of his fellow writer friends to share poems and reflections in response to the prompt: what would Martin Luther King's words be about the state of the world today? Here is a collection of their responses, along with links to author's websites when available. Please consider supporting their work through a donation or book purchase as you are moved and able.*

**Black Women be...  
by Toni Bee**

Black Women be...

Holding onto power  
even in extremes  
Power, holding on  
pushing thru  
to fulfill dreams

Clutching thru darkness  
unveiling the divine  
In ebon' do we clutch  
sweet plans, revealed  
In time

Lifting up each other  
with tables, fine, prepared  
Each other, we uplift  
envision, together, stay  
Always aware

Power, strength we unfold  
Unified is our playground  
Strength is what we hold  
Woman - almond, coffee, Black  
In past, right now  
In future we abound

<https://www.tonibee.org>

---

## **Still Dreaming**

***By Larissa Marthe Jeanniton***

Are you still dreaming Martin?  
Are we still in that dream?  
Us little black girls, boys, and they's - have grown up.  
Are you still dreaming, King?  
Our bold voices ring out with laughter, melanin warmed by golden sun.  
Hands joined with others of all colors, as you predicted.  
Our style, still inspiring everyone.  
We've got black faces on screens, prestigious awards in brown palms.  
Dr. King We've got Wakanda, a Black president, Black Excellence, #BlackJoy and Blacklove.

Some pit you against your brother Malcolm. Twitter trolls misquote you each year.  
Our schools have watered down your legacy, your true power out of fear.  
Your revolution was televised. We've got the footage to see.  
Even though they show us your photos in black and white to suggest a distance in time  
We all know that if they hadn't killed you, you could be sitting here among us at the wise  
old age of 93.  
No reparations check yet. Trust me, I looked in the mail.  
But King are you still dreaming? Because sometimes this dream can feel like hell.  
A knee held on neck. The nightmare begins  
Or continues.  
Dark shadows on pavement, red hues spilling into frame  
We've all learned to  
Chant  
Scream  
Say his name.  
Her Name. His Name. Their Name. More.  
What was it this week that our black blood was spilled for?  
Caught on candid camera. A new viral show.  
Body cam footage, redacted, cover ups.  
"This is American the beautiful! What else do you people need to know?" Our justice  
system has further evolved to keep just us locked up.  
Liberty and Justice for all. Words many of us do not trust.  
We're dodging bullets in classrooms, churches, and bars.  
We're moving targets, threats with our hands on the steering wheel of our own cars.

Are you still dreaming Martin? My question feels selfish now, I know.  
Because you've done your work. Planted your seeds and we've watered and watched  
them grow.  
We've benefited from the harvest. Our stomachs full and round,  
With the revolution you set in motion, our feet led by your dream and sound.

You'd be proud of the world we live in. Your heart would also crack in new ways.  
Fragmented by a racism that has further gripped this country, this planet with the new  
technical age.

Your work is done King. Your dreams came true.  
The next step is for us, the new dreamers to carry the legacy on for you.  
New leaders, new voices are conjured in my mind's eye. I'm meditating, communing  
with my ancestors to find my inner peace in this ongoing fight.

And that's when I feel it. That we are dreaming no more.  
This awakening, this deep knowing woven into our cores.  
We can dream with our eyes open. Live the truth we need to see.  
That freedom that Dr. King dreamt about is that knowing vibration inside you. And inside  
me.  
That love is here now. Just breathe deep. Just feel.  
This miracle of our very black existence through it all is hard evidence that his dream  
will always be very real.

---

**Dr. Regine Michelle Jean Charles**, Director of Africana Studies, Dean's Professor of Culture and Social Justice, and Professor of Africana Studies and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Northeastern University, read a powerful excerpt from her 2021 book "**Martin Luther King and the Trumpet of Conscience Today.**" Please consider buying a copy [here!](#) See [here](#) for Regine's Northeastern bio to learn more about her work.

---

**Outside Boston University's Agganis Arena with Those Who Couldn't Get Tickets to Martin Luther King Jr.'s Ninety-Fourth Birthday Address, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**By Tom Laughlin**

*"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." – Martin Luther King, Jr.\**

The sky is hazy now  
as Dr. King's speech ends, and we look up finally  
from simulcasts on our phones and iPad screens,  
the afternoon sun straining through a mesh of gauze  
above a rainbow of hats and the line of winter-empty trees  
frozen in red brick and sidewalk cement  
on their march west along Commonwealth Ave.  
Following the crackle of commands echoing from belted radios,  
the blue peaked caps of Boston have begun to move  
into position again—white and black and Asian men and women—  
readying at crosswalks and arena doors,

with their Secret Service cousins in black,  
for the throng of dignitaries, celebrities, clergy,  
and Dr. King himself, flanked by family.

Some in our outside crowd are being asked a second time  
to step back from the stanchions and red ropes,  
and we move slowly in our daze of emotion  
eyes still struggling into focus,  
children waking after a shared dream.  
The January breeze can't touch us now  
as we're still aflame with the glory of Dr. King's face,  
deeply lined now, but with eyes sharply focused,  
and the echo of his passionate call  
for a just, inclusive, sustainable world  
where unity trumps dis-unity,  
love triumphs over hate,  
and our children and children's children will make it  
past the mountaintop and into the Promised Land.

Tomorrow we'll turn back renewed  
with energy, determination, and hope  
to continue our work in neighborhoods and  
classrooms, community centers and churches,  
libraries, ball fields, board rooms, and banks,  
small businesses and non-profits, community colleges  
and corporations, sports arenas, town halls, and temples,  
public buses, police departments, polling places, and  
prisons, newsrooms and courtrooms and mosques,  
health care centers, hospitals, and universities,  
synagogues and social clubs, soup kitchens  
and state houses, and everywhere  
"that unarmed truth and unconditional love  
will have the final word in reality."\*\*

\*From his "Loving Your Enemies" sermon, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, November 17, 1957.

\*\*From his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Oslo, Norway, 1964.

[TomLaughlinPoet.com](http://TomLaughlinPoet.com)

---

## **Meeting MLK** **by Karl Smith**

I am here today because my dear brother Jean-Dany asked me to be here. He does not know I traveled several hundred miles to be here. He is worth that sort of thing.

My brother's request was a rather large one. He wants us to speak on the following question: what would MLK's words say about the state of the world today? I scratched my head and thought, Is that all?

JD asked me to speak from the heart. No intellectualism. Ok then, so today I take off my professor hat and speak from the heart. I brought my imagination and soul in on this as well. If I drift toward academic speak you will kindly tell my brain to keep out of this.

I was not ready to put words in the mouth of the Martin Luther King. And besides, he always spoke so well for himself. Egads, I thought. Perhaps he still does! I just have to find a way to talk to him.

I went to my ancestors. They could guide me on how to reach him. My uncle Louis, my cousin Vincent, my grandfather Prince Albert, my grandmother Margaret Lancaster and my own father, Charles Thomas. I wasn't messing around; I was calling in the big guns.

They all spoke well of Dr. King. They were elusive about where I can find him, though, they said he would find me. They warned me that he often answers questions with questions and he often re-shapes himself. I might find myself speaking with the youthful King, a moment later, the Nobel Prize King and a moment after that the King radicalized by Vietnam. That one, they said I should be careful of, that one gets cranky because His words are ignored by those with bad intentions, overlooked by those who should know better, and completely unacknowledged by the youth, who, through no fault of their own, have never even heard of the so called "radical" King.

"Where do I find him?" I insisted.

"In your heart and where he always is," they said.

What the heck does that mean?

Nothing happened for several days. I got aggravated. Had the ancestors let me down? Was I unworthy of a King meeting? Maybe he had become a Nobel Prize snob. Since I don't have one, maybe he wouldn't talk to me; maybe he's too busy hobnobbing with the likes of Toni Morrison, Nelson Mandela, and the truckloads of Harvard professors with Nobel's.

I looked for him around the grand statue near the mall in DC. Not there. I looked for him in the corridors of power. Not there. I thought he would be arm in arm with the politicians who love to quote him. Not there. I even looked for him in that new statue in Boston

Common. Surely that 20' foot high 40' wide, 38,000-pound mammoth had space for his spirit. Maybe he would be in Coretta's eternal embrace. Nope. Not there.

I finally found him in the last place I looked. I found Dr. King working a trash truck, in Detroit, just a few blocks from the street that bears his name, just west of the Cass Corridor. He was wearing blue overalls with mysterious stains on the front of the pants and most of the sleeves. The air smelled like when you're stuck in traffic behind a garbage truck on a warm spring day. Over the left breast pocket in red stitching on a white background were the words I Am a Man. He motioned for me to walk along with him as he helped heaved trash cans into the maw of the truck.

I had a dozen questions about black people in America today: school to prison pipelines, Black Lives Matter, systematic racism. He looked at me with a look of sadness yet hope. To my heart he conveyed thoughts of unity, so much unity, Finally, some white brothers and sisters get it now. They get it! Around the world there are people that get it. Look at those global protests after Brother George Floyd's murder. But the reactionaries will dig in. Backlash will be devilish. Remember that for those accustomed to privilege equality feels like oppression.

A moment later I saw Dr King dressed in a tuxedo. We were in Oslo at the Grand Hotel for the Nobel Prize banquet. King Gustaf Adolf was present. People glided in and out in a way only people born to wealth can. They don't walk, they float. They don't talk, they converse. They don't drink, they sip.

Dr. King looked at me, sipped some 1964 Moet and Chandon cuvee Dom Perignon looked at me and said nothing. Again. In my heart I felt his thoughts: "We must all learn to live together as brothers or we shall perish together as fools."

The last time I saw Dr King was in, and I mean in, the Rio Grande River, about 50 miles west of Nuevo Laredo. He was speaking Spanish to women and children as he helped them wade across the Rio Grande. He was up to his waist in that brown murky river water. He wore a shirt that said "La injusticia en cualquier lugar es una amenaza a la justicia en todas partes!" He directed the migrants to where they can get water, food and shelter. He made sure they understood what to say if they were captured by authorities, and that they should not resist violently. He made sure they knew that what he was doing was illegal, but that he was bound to follow a higher law.

He gave me that look again. I thought about his words on classism. This time they got mixed in and bundled together with some new ingredients, like a taco united by a sumptuous tangy salsa verde. Say their names. Say their names. We can't breathe.

I thanked him for his time and turned to go. He actually, finally, spoke to me as I walked away.

Please, make them stop abusing my 'I Have a Dream' speech. I'm dreaming of a world where people are equal because they are seen as equal citizens regardless of the color of their skin; I'm not dreaming of some mythical magical color blindness that erases their identity, culture and history. You can't snap your fingers and say, 'Discrimination is

gone today!' 'Racism is gone today!' 'I don't see color!' What do you see then, when you look at me, some kind of monochrome grey blur? Make them stop that, please.

Make sure you all understand that, as Doris Allen said, "The power of love is stronger than the love of power."

Make sure you all know that we must extend the arms of love around your family, your god, your tribe, and now to all of humanity.

You know, other messengers have come and gone. They also spoke of universal love. Some people get it. Never all, but a few more every time.

---

## **Moral Compass**

***By Tom Wylie***

Dear Martin, **54 years gone**, and I wonder where are your many gifts that the world so desperately needs now.

**54 years gone**, taken at 39 when I was a mere 23 and teaching, with inspiration from you, on Panay Island in the Pacific, when on April 4, 1968, you were murdered by the forces of hate.

Despite your most kind and forgiving resolution,

*"hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that"*

Today, when I think about forces of hate I want to shout, get those Bastards, lock em up, take em out, destroy their false privileges, their unearned benefits, their laws and polices that hinder, block, and hold back millions of others.

But then I pause and recall your wisdom, your understanding compassion, and incredible ability to offer a calm sense of the purpose of our lives with your beautiful statement,

*"love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."*

**54 years gone**, and your moral compass needed more than ever, to continue the fight against racism, repression, economic, social and political injustice world-wide, especially injustices to African Americans, who carry our 400-year history of mistreatment.

I offer these words from Boston, a city you know well, which

is unveiling a long-needed statue tribute to the grace of your presence and everlasting message of hope, so we may be guided and inspired to continue fulfill your call to

*“never be satisfied.”*

Dear Martin, **54 years gone**, the world a lovely place and an ugly one too; on your 94<sup>th</sup> birthday. We seek a deeper embrace of you and your gifts and calls for action that the U.S. and world may become “a more perfect union.”