

**“I Have a Dream” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr
August 28th, 1963, March on Washington**

Choral Reading for Tigard United Methodist ESL 1/11/19

King 1: *I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.*

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men - yes, black men as well as white men - would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check that has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice.

People: *We have also come to his hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.*

King 2: It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hoped that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. ***There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.***

King 3: But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. ***In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.*** Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

People: *And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for whites only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York*

believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

King 4: I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

(cue 5:34 We saw that) ***Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today my friends - so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:***

People: ***"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."***

Table 1: I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Table 2: I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification - one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

Table 3: I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

Table 4: This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

Table 5: This will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my father's died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!"

King 5: And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Table 1: Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Table 2: Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

Table 3: But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Table 4: Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Table 5: Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi - from every mountainside!

People: Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring - when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children - black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics - will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

"Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

The Progress of Civil Rights and Voting Law in the United States of America

1863 Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln:

“On the first day of January, in the year of our Lord 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom...

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, ***I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free;*** and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons. And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

1865 Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution:

The Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime. Though three to four million slaves had been declared free by President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. ***Congress intended the Thirteenth Amendment to be a proclamation of freedom for all slaves throughout the nation.*** (The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in rebellious states.)

1868 Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution:

Guarantees the same rights to all citizens of the United States, and the equal protection of those rights, against the deprivation of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.

The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) granted United States citizenship to former slaves and to *all persons "subject to U.S. jurisdiction"*. It also contained three new limits on state power: a state shall not violate a citizen's privileges or immunities; shall not deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; and must guarantee all persons equal protection of the laws. These limitations dramatically expanded the protections of the Constitution. ***Prior to the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment, the protections in the Bill of Rights limited only the actions of the federal government, unless the provision specifically stated otherwise. This amendment, according to the Supreme Court's Doctrine of Incorporation, makes most provisions of the Bill of Rights applicable to state and local governments as well.***

1870 Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution:

Prohibits the use of race, color, or previous condition of servitude in determining which citizens may vote.

1896 Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court Decision:

A landmark United States Supreme Court decision upholding the constitutionality of state laws requiring racial segregation in public facilities under the doctrine of “separate but equal.”

In his case, *Homer Adolph Plessy v. The State of Louisiana*, Plessy's lawyers argued that the state law which required East Louisiana Railroad to segregate trains had denied him his rights under the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments of the United States Constitution which provided for equal treatment under the law. However, the judge presiding over his case, John Howard Ferguson, ruled that Louisiana had the right to regulate railroad companies while they operated within state boundaries. Plessy was convicted and sentenced to pay a \$25 fine. ***"Separate but equal" remained standard doctrine in U.S. law until its repudiation in the 1954 Supreme Court decision Brown v. Board of Education.***

1920 Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution:

Prohibits the government from denying women the right to vote on the same terms as men. Prior to the amendment's adoption, only a few states permitted women to vote and to hold office. With its ratification, this right was extended to all women nationwide.

1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court Decision:

A landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing **separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional**. The decision overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, which allowed state-sponsored segregation, insofar as it applied to public education. Handed down on May 17, 1954, the Warren Court's unanimous (9–0) decision stated that **"separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."**

1961 Twenty-third Amendment to the US Constitution:

Extends the right to vote in presidential elections to citizens residing in the District of Columbia by granting the District electors in the Electoral College, as if it were a state (but no more than the smallest state).

1964 Twenty-fourth Amendment to the US Constitution:

Prohibits the government from imposing a poll tax—a state imposed fee for voting. Although passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments helped remove many of the discriminatory laws left over from slavery, they did not eliminate all forms of discrimination. **Along with literacy tests and durational residency requirements, poll taxes were used to keep low-income (primarily African American) citizens from participating in elections. The Supreme Court has since struck down these discriminatory measures, opening democratic participation to all, regardless of one's ability to pay.**

1964 Civil Rights Act passed by the US Congress:

Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Prohibits unequal application of voter registration requirements, racial segregation in schools, employment, and public accommodations.

1965 Voting Rights Act passed by the US Congress:

Provides for federal oversight and enforcement of voter registration voting. In 1963, only 156 of 15,000 eligible black voters in Selma, Alabama, were registered to vote. The federal government filed four lawsuits against the county registrars between 1963 and 1965, but the number of black registered voters only increased from 156 to 383 during that time. The law couldn't keep up with the pace and intensity of voter suppression. **The Voting Rights Act ended the voting discrimination in places like Selma by eliminating the literacy tests and poll taxes that prevented so many people from voting.**

1971 Twenty-sixth Amendment to the US Constitution:

Prohibits the government from denying the right of United States citizens, eighteen years of age or older, to vote on account of age. **The drive to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 grew across the country during the 1960s, driven in large part by the broader student activism movement protesting the Vietnam War.**

2014 Shelby County v. Holder Supreme Court Decision:

The 1965 Voting Rights Law required that lawmakers in states with a history of discriminating against minority voters get federal permission before changing voting rules. In *Shelby County (Texas) v. Holder* (Eric Holder, the Attorney General of the U.S.) the Supreme Court invalidated this requirement. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act required federal review of new voting rules in 15 states, most of them in the South. (In a few of these states, only specific counties or townships were covered.) **The Supreme court in a 5-4 decision found that blanket federal protection wasn't needed to stop discrimination and that the Shelby County voter identification requirement was neither discrimination nor a "poll tax."**

Justice Ginsburg dissented, joined by Justices Sotomayor and Kagan. **"The greatest threat to public confidence in elections in this case is the prospect of enforcing a purposefully discriminatory law, one that likely imposes an unconstitutional poll tax and risks denying the right to vote to hundreds of thousands of eligible voters," Ginsburg wrote.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>