

What Does Sunday Have To Do With Monday?
Exodus 6:1-13
John 15:12-17

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

What does Sunday have to do with Monday? What does the word read and proclaimed and acted out at the font and table on Sunday have to do with the way you lead your life come Monday morning? What does life in this sanctuary have to do with the lives lost and remembered out there on our front lawn? Here is my first hunch: the gossamer thread that keeps us tethered to the gospel day in and day out has something to do with the community that attempts on Sunday to read the story of God’s dealings with us into each of our autobiographies on Monday.

Allow me to illustrate what I mean with a few reflections on the life of Martin Luther King Jr. In his book on *Biography as Theology*, James McClendon reads King’s life through the lens of Scripture. Here was a man, he says, who “interpreted *the present moment* and his own role in it by means of the Bible. King did this without arrogance or presumption,” says McClendon, “yet he enabled his followers to see that the [story] of the Old Testament, the [the story of] God doing things in history, was true of the Black man [and the Black woman] in America now.”

To be more specific, “King’s use of the image of oppressive Pharaohs, Hebrews longing for freedom from Egypt, the threatening wilderness, and the Promised Land in his writing... often took the form of incisive *metaphors*.” At the beginning of the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, King could have interpreted the witness of the marchers through the lens of human rights or principles of fairness and justice. Instead he said to people whose lives had been shaped by the biblical narrative: “Walk together, children; don’t you get weary, and it will lead up to the Promised Land. And Alabama will be a new Alabama, and America will be a new America.” When the movement for civil rights encountered opposition from those in positions of

power, he could have called them to account on the basis of the rule of law or invoked the story of the nation's founding. Instead he spoke of the "Pharaohs of the South" who would "risk drowning their own armies rather than let God's people go free. 'When the pressure is increased, pharaohs will say, "Wait," Then pharaohs will say, "Go slower," What the pharaohs mean...is "Never." Pharaohs may try tokenism, but this is only a way to end pressure, not to begin the process of liberation.'" Then on his last day, just moments before an assassin's bullet would end his life, he tells a gathering of striking sanitation workers, "I've been on the mountaintop....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!"

The story that gave meaning and purpose to King's story on Monday morning was the story he had been told since he was a little boy on Sunday morning (and probably Sunday night too and Wednesday night prayer meetings and every day in his home by his parents). It was the story of a God who freed slaves and made promises; it was the story of a God who spoke to prophets and of prophets who spoke truth to power; it was the story of a God who put down the powerful from their thrones and raised up those of low degree. It was the story of a God who emptied himself and took on the form of a slave, humbling himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. That story read and proclaimed, shouted and sung, acted out as young Martin died to himself in the waters of baptism and was reborn a child of God, that story became his story Monday in Birmingham and Friday in Selma and Tuesday in Washington and Thursday in Atlanta and even on that fateful Wednesday night in Memphis.

McClendon concludes that the biblical narrative hovered in the background of King's thinking, "guiding, shaping the faith by which he walked." His dream was "a dream which remembered old stories, told long ago, of a God who did not desert his people on this earthly journey, but who went before them night and day. It was a dream whose interpretation required a

voice to cry out, and weary feet to march, and many a soul to pray.”

What does Sunday have to do with Monday? My hunch is that, as the always counter-cultural story of Scripture hovers in the background of your thinking, guiding, shaping the faith by which you walk, you will find your voice crying out and your feet growing weary and your knees worn down by prayer. Though to be perfectly honest, sometimes the story that is told on Sunday gets mistold; or even if, by grace, on Sunday the truth of the gospel makes it through our thick heads, on Monday fear and insecurity can lead us to the malpractice rather than the practice of discipleship. I would also venture to say that mistelling and malpractice are more likely when the narrative context of Scripture is set aside in favor of isolated, idolized verses that are literally (literally!) believed as disembodied truths and when the interpreters believe more in the way things are than in future God has promised. This is how slavery was justified, women silenced, homophobia fueled, apartheid underwritten, to name a few of the other ways that Sunday has had to do with Monday.

Perhaps the miracle is that the church does manage of a Sunday to speak and sing and act out the gospel such that, now and again, you and I dare to do something brave or generous or prophetic or loving on Monday morning, thereby begging a second question: What happens on Sunday that sends us into the world differently on Monday?

This time the hunch is not mine and it is not really a hunch. For a moment I want to address the empirically oriented in this crowd whose numbers are legion! On December 23rd, Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi in England, wrote an op-ed that asked, in light of the predicted demise of religion, how anyone behaves morally on Monday, especially when natural selection should favor ruthlessness? Apparently inquiring neuroscientists also want to know. Seems, in the first place, “We have mirror neurons that lead us to feel pain when we see others suffering. We are hard-wired for empathy.” If our front lawn is any clue, you could have fooled me, but who

am I to argue with science? Then I read that part of our brain is also hard-wired to focus on potential dangers to us as individuals, while the other, located in the prefrontal cortex, takes a more considered view of the consequence of our actions for us and others. The first is immediate, instinctive and emotive (fast). The second is reflective and rational (slow).” The first may help us to survive but can also lead us to behave destructively. The first has everything to do with the 331 lives lost on our lawn. The second finds us weighing our choices in relation to others, taking our time to think about the consequences of our actions in the larger community. So, for instance, the nation ponders the balance of selfish gain and human need. As Sachs observes, “We are sinners and saints, egotists and altruists, exactly as the prophets and philosophers have long maintained.”

But here is the reason I bring any of this up this morning. Studies further show that what we do on Sunday morning (or Friday night or Saturday morning for that matter), “strengthens and speeds up the slow track. [Worship] reconfigures our neural pathways, turning altruism into instinct, through the rituals we perform, the texts we read, and the prayers we pray,” says Sachs. “It binds individuals into groups through habits of altruism, creating relationships of trust strong enough to defeat destructive emotions.”

The research of Robert Putnam further bears this out. You will remember Putnam from *Bowling Alone* in the 90s, but now in *Amazing Grace* he reports that “frequent church- or synagogue-goers [are] more likely to give money to charity, do volunteer work, help the homeless, donate blood, help a neighbor with housework, spend time with someone who was feeling depressed, offer a seat to a stranger or help someone find a job. Religiosity as measured by church or synagogue attendance is, he found, a better predictor of altruism than education, age, income, gender or race.”

What does Sunday have to do with Monday? According to social science, quite a bit;

though I find myself uneasy championing worship attendance on Sunday as a utilitarian exercise in reprogramming our prefrontal cortex. So let me ask for the third time: What exactly happens on Sunday that sends us into the world differently on Monday? Quitting social science for theology, I would say for me that the most astonishing moment every Sunday is the moment when we ask for and receive God's mercy: when we are forgiven. In that moment, you and I get to start over with God and one another. At the beginning of every week, we are given a whole new life. The word we use to talk about that forgiveness is justification and the word we use to talk about that whole new life is sanctification. Sunday reminds us that we are justified by grace through faith so that, when Monday dawns, we will wake to a life of service and obedience as those who have been freed from our past and commanded to love one another as we have been loved by God in Christ. In Calvin's *Institutes*, under the heading of sanctification, you find discussions of discipleship, of repentance and conversion, of good works, and of the cross.

But note also that John Calvin was so concerned the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith would become an excuse for moral license and sloth—meaning because we are forgiven on Sunday we can do as we please on Monday—he placed the doctrine of sanctification before the doctrine of justification. “The faithful,” he wrote, “are never reconciled to God without the gift of sanctification, yea, to this end are we justified, that afterward we might worship God in holiness of life.” In other words, Monday has everything to do with Sunday! It does not matter a damn if you are forgiven on Sunday unless forgiveness leads to a life marked by the love we know in him who laid down his life for his friends--and his enemies.

For finally, my friends, the love we are commanded on Sunday to embody on Monday by him who was murdered on Friday requires something more than liturgical patterning or literary mimesis. “Love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus said to his disciples on Thursday. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” Sunday requires of us our

life on Monday. We cannot accomplish this by effort or a perfect Sunday school attendance pin earned. Love one another *as I have loved you*. In sum, “When Christ calls a man,” said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “he calls him to come and die.” Die to who you have been today and wake tomorrow to who you are in him, that by his grace and maybe a prefrontal cortex reconfigured for self-giving and the story of a God who sets people free hovering in your mind, you might do something brave on Monday.

“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life,” said Martin at the last. “Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will.” Thanks be to God.