

2018-01-14 MLK Sunday

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January 14, 2018

Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

It is such a joy and a privilege to be back together with all of you here in the pulpit of Baber AME church.

[audience shouts "Amen!"]

Amen. You know my congregation - there's nothing wrong with them, they're good people - but they don't tend to do that "talk back" thing. So if I'm talking over your Talk Back just tell me "Slow down pastor!".

You know every time that we are together I tell you how grateful I am for the friendship that has grown over the years between our two congregations. How grateful I am to God for this friendship which has taught me so much and taught my people so much, which has made us better citizens of heaven here on Earth. And I tell you whenever I come here there's a little bit of nervousness, right? I feel a little bit of nerves until I come in and then I get in the sanctuary. And there's so much beauty and truth, and there's so much Holy Spirit that it all kind of melts away. And I'm able to remember that it doesn't necessarily matter what I say because God has already said so much. And Reverend too! Yeah OK. You know Reverend we are in the middle of a capital campaign of ours and I forgot to do the pound cake part. And I think that might be what we need! OK. So I'm grateful to God for all of you and I'm so grateful to God for my friendship with your esteemed pastor Reverend James C. Simmons. You are so blessed to have him lead your church and we're so blessed to have him in Rochester. And if that bishop if yours ever comes calling for him you're going to come through me first! You know nonviolently of course.

[laughter/applause]

Yeah. I texted Pastor Simmons on Friday. I had a couple of questions about the liturgy and said you know if you got this the one thing going on and he said - he didn't text back he called back -

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and he said he said “Scott, what are you doing?” It’s my best Pastor Simmons impression. Then I said oh not much I'm emailing. And he said “Are you at the church?” and I said yes. He said “I'm on my way” because that's how Pastor Simon rolls. Just comes and picks you right up. Yeah. And he gets there and he’s got his new car, and you know he's a sharp dressed fella right? Yes the hat and suit coat. I said if I had known you were coming today I would have worn my jeans without the hole in the knee. And I would have gotten out my dress hoodie! Now I look like a fool at the restaurant next to, yeah you know. Oh you know one last thing before I get into the actual sermon part. I want to let all of you know about an event that's coming up at Artisan. Now this is going to be news to the Artisan people too because I only confirmed this a few days ago. But it's an event that we are holding on March 3rd and I would like to invite not just the Artisan community, but the Baber community and the whole Rochester community to this event. I'm very excited for it, it’s an event called Rethinking Incarceration. I have a friend and colleague, a pastor in Chicago named Dominique DuBois Gilliard who has written a book that will be released on February sixth by that title: Rethinking Incarceration. And this book got a star review by Publishers Weekly it's being described as a building on the work of Michelle Alexander in The New Jim Crow - which is pretty high praise. And so, he will be in Rochester and at Artisan presenting from the book and it includes a history of racialized incarceration in America. And then in what is very important for many of us in the church to hear - a discussion of how the theology of certain faith traditions has made that problem worse, not better. So. I would love to have you all be there, we would love to have your support, and we have a special musical guest that night as well who has been confirmed. You may know her her name is Danielle Ponder. That's right and somebody suggested to me that the Baber choir might be a nice addition to the musical slate that evening. I don't know what do you think? You think we can do that? I think we'll find a way. Yeah. By the way, how did you get Danielle Ponder to preach when she came to your church? She came to my church and I said can you, you know, give a sermon? She's like no I don't do that.

[laughter]

All right so the evening of March 3rd please mark your calendars, I would love to have you be there for that.

Well today is the day when we come together to celebrate one of America's greatest citizens and leaders - the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr. Now at Artisan Church right now we are observing the season of Epiphany which is a season in which we celebrate the revelation of the mysteries of God through His Son Jesus Christ. And I hope that you will permit me, for just a few minutes, to use one of the Scripture texts that's assigned to us for this Sunday in Epiphany, in

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the spirit of Dr King's message. So that text from John chapter one verses forty three through fifty and I will read that to you now.

43 *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."* **44** *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.* **45** *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."* **46** *Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* Philip said to him, "Come and see." **47** *When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"* **48** *Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?"* Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." and I sometimes wonder what Nathanael might have been plotting underneath that fig tree that he might not want people to know about, and Jesus said he saw him there. That's not in the text I like to imagine that part. **49** *Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* **50** *Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."* **51** *And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

Nathaniel asks: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Now spoiler alert - we know how the story ends. We know that something very good had come out of Nazareth - Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God. Jesus Christ who was fully divine, was fully God, and yet, in one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith, also fully human. Now I don't want to get down this road to be too up in my head on the theological side of things, with the ivory tower and the academia but this humanity of Jesus is important to the story. And it's important to us because it is something that each one of us share with the very Son of God. In the fullness of our humanity we share the fullness of Jesus's humanity. Each one of us bears that same humanity that Jesus bore, for we are all - the scriptures tell us - icons. Images of God. Made in the image and the likeness of the Creator. Now hear this: it was the humanity of Jesus, not the divinity of Jesus, that caused Nathaniel to be so dismissive of him. Do you think if Nathaniel knew that Jesus was fully God he would have said: "Nazareth? Has anything good ever come out of Nazareth?" He said that because he thought Jesus was only a human. As if being only a human is something to scoff at. Because he only knew Jesus as a man he was quick to say "Oh you know about people who come from *that* place." Has anyone ever said that about the place you came from? "Could anything good have come from *there*?" Kind of curled up their lips, sneer their nose. Maybe you come from a poor rural community like I did. Maybe you come from the so-called wrong side of the tracks. Maybe you come from a neighborhood that the snowplows have forgotten, that the fire trucks don't reach in time, and where the police cars bring fear more than protection. Maybe you're a person who is regarded as not smart enough or beautiful

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enough or straight enough or able bodied enough or wealthy enough or educated enough to be considered valuable enough to love or to take care of. Or to lift up. Or to show the image of the creator of the universe. Maybe you're someone who comes from - I don't know - Mexico or El Salvador or Haiti one of the nations of Africa. Right? Now you all know I told you I don't get political in my pulpit. But I'm not in my pulpit.

[applause]

Thank you. I know that you may come from a place that causes the people of this world, some of them, to reject you or hate you. But I'm here to tell you that wherever you came from, something good came from that place because it was you. Your neighbors may not think you're good enough. Your professors may not think you're good enough. Your parents may not think you're good enough. Senators may not think you're good enough. The judge and the jury may not think you're good enough. Whatever fool might happen to be in the White House at a given time might not think you are good enough. I am embarrassed to say that even your church leader sometimes might not think you're good enough. God forgive us when we do. But I'm here to tell you that you, each one of you, are fearfully and wonderfully made.

[applause]

Fearfully and wonderfully made by the God of the universe who loves you and thinks you are wonderful. God thinks you are good enough to heal. God thinks you are good enough to serve. God thinks you are good enough that He would wash your feet. God thinks you are good enough that He would empty himself of divinity and take on the form of human body, and go to a humiliating death on the cross for you.

The very humanity that people are so quick to dismiss, is the same humanity that makes you a bearer of the image and likeness of God. It is the same humanity that was taken on by Jesus himself. The same humanity that Nathaniel was so quick to cast aside. And so if society casts you aside, if the people who are supposed to love you cast you aside, if the people who are supposed to protect you cast you aside, remember that when you are cast aside by the people of this world you stand in solidarity with Jesus Christ the Son of God. And he stands in solidarity with you!

[applause]

This is what I think Dr King's dream was trying to get us to understand. That the world would come to see each other the way that God already sees each one of us. That we might be judged on the content of our character rather than the color of our skin. And through his ministry and

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light we have cast out some of the darkness in our country. We have cast light on some of the shadow that kept hidden the works of evil. Through his example we have seen and received, those of us who needed, so much inspiration. And we have received, those of us who needed it, so much conviction. By the way don't whitewash Dr. King, right? If Pastor Simmons was preaching here he would tell you a lot more about that. Tomorrow maybe?

[laughter]

We have received so much from the ministry of Dr King and yet there is so much work yet to be done. Sometimes you read the words or hear the the sermons or the speeches that he gave and you think - that is all a little bit too familiar still. "Evil may so shape events," Dr King wrote, "that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross. But that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B. C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name." And now the part that you might remember, yes, "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice."

Some days even now, all these years later, we sense the loooooong bend of the universe and not enough of the bend toward justice. We sense that the moral arc just stretches and stretches out and it's not bending in the way we want. It's not bending as fast as we want toward the justice that we so long to see. We could use a sharper bend toward justice today couldn't we? There have been setbacks. There will be more setbacks. But we have a love that cannot be contained. We carry a light that will not be extinguished. We carry the revelation of the mysteries of God through Jesus Christ. This message of blessed love that brings us hope, it gives us cause to feel hope. Nathaniel got it wrong at first, but he got it right in the end. Some of us got it wrong at first, and we need to repent and get it right in time for the end. Now if we, like Nathaniel, will respond to the revelation of God in the person of Jesus by casting aside our judgment, by crucifying our cynicism, by dismissing our second guessing, by refusing to exclude and segregate. If we will follow Jesus and if we will act in His way, then we will have harnessed the power of the universe. We will have harnessed the power that can change everything. And we will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Oh Lord don't make us wait too long. May we see more of it in our lifetimes. And may the reason we see more of it in our lifetimes be because we have made it real in our lives. Will you bow in prayer with me?

Lord Jesus who revealed yourself to Nathaniel in a shocking way that disarmed his prejudice, we pray that you would reveal yourself to us in as shocking a way as it takes to reveal the prejudice that remains in our hearts even now. Give us the humility and courage required to say "I was wrong and I repent, and I will change my mind and my heart. Because the story of the

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universe will not bend toward justice until the story of my heart bends toward justice.” Oh Lord on this day when we are together more so than on others, we give you thanks for the beauty and diversity of your kingdom. And it causes us to rejoice even as we lament that is so rare that we see it. Help us learn from each other how to love better, and how to carry that love into the communities of faith, into the neighborhoods of our city, into the halls of power around our country and around the world. May your love and your justice bring down we pray Oh Lord, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com