

The Gables – MLK Birthday, Racial Healing

Opening Story:

Just before Barack Obama completed his second term as president, he received a letter from a young boy indicating he was very concerned about prejudice. The youngster wrote he couldn't believe some people discriminated against others based solely on the color of their hair. The president laughed, of course, because he knew the kid meant to write skin color, not hair color, but the message was profound nonetheless.

When you think about it, isn't it ridiculous we sometimes judge others simply because of the color of their skin? Didn't God create all of us, regardless of our skin color?

Dr. Martin Luther King addressed this issue in his famous, "I have a Dream" speech. He said, "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." – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963.

Dialog:

Rick: Hey Donna, do you know it's Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday tomorrow?

Donna: Of course.

Rick: Why do you think that's important?

Donna: Because you get the day off from work?

Rick: Hmm! Any other reason?

Donna: Because we can sleep in late and go shopping?

Rick: [Shakes his head.] I think the main reason is to celebrate the life of a man who fought to bring racial justice and equality to our nation.

Donna: Oh, okay ... So why is there still prejudice in the world anyway?

Rick: Prejudice is defined in the dictionary as "any preconceived opinion or feeling, either favorable or unfavorable." I believe prejudice is a learned behavior. I read somewhere about a very young white boy, who was best friends with black boy at school, thinking the two of them were twins. They decided to play a trick on their teacher. They exchanged their hats, coats, and backpacks, stood before her in the classroom, and hoped they could fool her into thinking one was the other. It never occurred to them that their skin color was different.

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Donna: If prejudice is learned, why is there still racial injustice and inequality today? Haven't schools and the media been drilling into kids for years that racial prejudice is a bad thing?

Rick: That's a very complicated question, Donna.

While a Civil War waged during the 1860s purported to end slavery, and a civil rights war during the 1960s purported to end racial discrimination, issues persist. Decades of protest marches, court battles, school busing, legislative actions, and discussion panels, while helpful, have failed to bring lasting racial harmony. We must conclude, therefore, that the ultimate resolution of this issue does not reside with the politicians or professors. The answer, I submit, resides with the pastors.

Donna: The pastors? What do you mean?

Rick: Most people look at the source of the problem as being centuries of institutional neglect, prejudice, poverty, greed, oppression, and other such externalities, but ultimately the problem is internal. The problem resides in the human heart.

Donna: The Bible says the human heart is desperately wicked, doesn't it?

Rick: Yes. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (NKJV).

Donna: If the human heart has always been wicked, and always will be, what can be done about this problem? It sounds hopeless.

Rick: The challenge to the white community is this: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). We ought to ask God to reveal any racist thoughts within us, or racist acts committed by us. If we have searched our hearts, and asked God to search our hearts, and confessed and repented of any known sins, we can have a clear conscience. 1 John 3:21 says, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we can have confidence before God."

Donna: That makes sense, but what about the black community. Is there anything they should do?

Rick: The challenge for the black community is this: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15). We ought to forgive the perpetrators of injustices committed against our ancestors in America over the past 400 years, and any injustices perpetrated against us personally, if we expect God to forgive us for things we've done wrong. We can't always control what other people do to us, but we can always control

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what we do to them. If we fail to forgive, we allow the perpetrators to enslave our minds and hearts and retain their power over us.

Donna: Aren't you being overly idealistic? What if whites won't ask God to search their hearts and blacks won't forgive? What then?

Rick: The opposite may be true too. It may be that some whites need to forgive blacks, and some blacks need to ask God to search their hearts, but it would never be neither.

Donna: What do you mean?

Rick:

1 John 1:8 says that "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." So, we all have to either ask God to search our hearts, forgive each other, or both, but not neither.

Only God can change people's hearts. We need to pray for racial healing in our country, one heart at a time. That's the only way we'll get to the place where each of us will "not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."