

## Pastor's Point

"But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust." *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

To my best recollection, I was 23 and in my first year of Divinity School when I first read Dr. King's writings beyond the obligatory paragraph found in his "I have a Dream" speech. I was, in fact, required to purchase a rather hefty text filled with his complete writings. It was just as thick and just as heavy as the study bible I'd been required to purchase earlier that year. I can still sit them down next to each other, binding to binding and remember how ashamed I felt that I'd graduated from high school and college with no idea that Dr. King was that prolific or eloquent.



Raised in a primarily white community and educated in white schools, I read poetry written by dead, white men and thought their small, limited perspective universal. I read bible storybooks populated by white characters and never even considered the fact that [Warner Sallman's "Head of Christ"](#) wasn't an actual portrait. And while I occasionally encountered clergy of color in my CC(DOC) universe, I failed to understand the significance of knowing so few.

It wasn't until many years later that I realized that this was perhaps one of the reasons my fellow young adults were opting out of the church. Our commitment to racial justice looked gratuitous and our justifications rang hollow. We were talking the talk, but failing to walk the walk —choosing a wishy-washy white Christ over a rabble-rousing Palestinian Jew named Jesus. We had failed to articulate how it was that a personal relationship with Jesus can only reach fullness in a communal striving for the Kingdom. For that, and a thousand other reasons, (the lack of praise bands not even making the top 10), friends I'd worshipped with around a church camp fire and planned a dozen CYF lock-ins with, walked away. And they weren't coming back. No matter how fabulous the sermon or fantastic the light show. Many of them went on to become principled people committed to a better world —doctors, under-dog attorneys, protest leaders, teachers, and non-profit directors. They were feeding the hungry and healing the sick and they were doing it in spite of the church, not because of it.

Clearly, we could simply switch out the words "twentieth century" for "twenty-first century" and Dr. King's words will still ring true. Many mainline congregations have settled for being social clubs with a passing interest in loving their neighbor. Many have snuggled into a Gospel of "I'm okay; you're okay" instead of "If you aren't okay, how can I possibly be?" Maybe this sounds harsh to your ears; maybe you're upset that anyone could ever level such an accusation at our little congregation, but I am more and more convinced everyday that the churches who focus inward, who settle for a status quo and a sanitized Holy Spirit, are the ones that will not survive. We can't solve all the world's problems, but choosing Kingdom justice over superficial nice-ness is definitely a place to start.

Blessings, Pastor H

*Pastor Heather*