



COVENANT GROUPS
All Souls Church, Unitarian
Beloved Community, September 2013

What Is Meant by the Beloved Community?

“The Beloved Community” is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world.

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

--excerpted from the King Center website. Find there also information about Dr. King’s six principles and six steps of nonviolence. These basics in Dr. King’s view form the foundation of the Beloved Community and offer both a method for achieving social change and a way of life.

In His Own Words: Quotes from Dr. King’s Writings

--Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

--Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding,

creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies—is the solution to the race problem.

--I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

--But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not *eros*, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not *philia*, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is *agape* which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.

--I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end or that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community.

--Whatever career you may choose for yourself - doctor, lawyer, teacher - let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights. Make it a central part of your life. It will make you a better doctor, a better lawyer, a better teacher. It will enrich your spirit as nothing else possibly can. It will give you that rare sense of nobility that can only spring from love and selflessly helping your fellow man. Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country and a finer world to live in.

Dr. King on Barriers to the Beloved Community

--Poverty

There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it. The time has come for an all-out world war against poverty ... The well off and the secure have too often become indifferent and oblivious to the poverty and deprivation in their midst. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. No individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for 'the least of these.'"

--Racism

Racism is a philosophy based on a contempt for life. It is the arrogant assertion that one race is the center of value and object of devotion, before which other races must kneel in submission. It is the absurd dogma that one race is responsible for all the progress of history and alone can assure the progress of the future. Racism is total estrangement. It

separates not only bodies, but minds and spirits. Inevitably it descends to inflicting spiritual and physical homicide upon the out-group.

--Militarism

A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war- 'This way of settling differences is not just.' This way of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

Source: Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? 1967

Other Voices

My life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community. **Josiah Rice, 1917**

Imagine how our own families, let alone the world, would change if we vowed to keep faith with one another, strengthen one another, look for and accentuate the virtues in one another, and speak graciously concerning one another. Imagine the cumulative effect if we treated each other with respect and acceptance, if we willingly provided support. Such interactions practiced on a small scale would surely have a rippling effect throughout our homes and communities and, eventually, society at large. **Gordon B. Hinckley**, *Standing for Something: 10 Neglected Virtues That Will Heal Our Hearts and Homes*

The problem, Mitch, is that we don't believe we are as much alike as we are. Whites and blacks, Catholics and Protestants, men and women. If we saw each other as more alike, we might be very eager to join in one big human family in this world, and to care about that family the way we care about our own. But believe me, when you are dying, you see it is true. We all have the same beginning - birth - and we all have the same end - death. So how different can we be? Invest in the human family. Invest in people. **Morrie Schwartz** in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch Albom

I am part and parcel of the whole and cannot find God apart from the rest of humanity. **Mahatma Gandhi**

We often think of peace as the absence of war, that if powerful countries would reduce their weapon arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we see our own minds- our own prejudices, fears and ignorance. Even if we transport all the bombs to the moon, the roots of war and the roots of bombs are still there, in our

hearts and minds, and sooner or later we will make new bombs. To work for peace is to uproot war from ourselves and from the hearts of men and women. **Thich Nhat Hahn**

Social justice insists that people are not their circumstances; they are their possibilities. **Donald Robinson** from *Voices from the Margins: A Book of Meditations*

One must think like a hero to behave like a merely decent human being. **May Sarton**

Discussion and Sharing

1. What is your reaction to Josiah Royce's idea that being a member of a community is what gives life meaning? Do you think of one community or many? What role does All Souls play?
2. How does the life of your immediate forebears relate to the struggle for equality and freedom? What impact has that had on the way you've lived your life?
3. Are you able to relate to others in terms of their circumstances or their possibilities? How have others related to you?
4. Poverty, racism, militarism. As you survey our world today, are you able to hate the sin and not the sinner? What have you been called to do with respect to poverty, racism and militarism? How do these issues—and your struggle against them--show up in the totality of your life? In your life as a member of the All Souls community?