

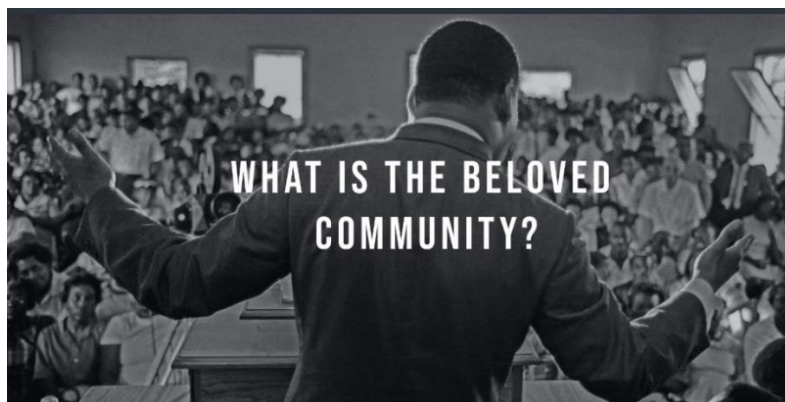


It's been called by many names: **Eden; Paradise; Utopia; Ideal; Dreamland.** These words have all been used to convey what **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** most frequently referred to as, "**THE BELOVED COMMUNITY.**" For him, it was the sustaining and permeating idea of triumphing over oppression and uniting humankind together as one family. The Bible calls this idea -- **THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**

Dr. King lived and died in pursuit of this dream. So did Jesus Christ, by the way. Ephesians chapter two makes it clear that racial reconciliation is at the forefront of Jesus' coming to earth and dying for our sins. Paul says,

"Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. *With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us.*"

Ephesians 2:14 CEB



<https://fight-back.org/post/Martin-Luther-King-Jr-Weekend-A-Beloved-Community>

If I were to ask you to describe for me "the beloved community," I'm wondering what words and phrases you would use? Perhaps the first statements we would hear are ones like – ***a society based upon justice, on equality of all people, on fellow love for all humanity, respect, dignity, and civil coexistence.*** We would undoubtedly also hear the importance of "***the content of my character and not the color of my skin,***" as well as notions like, "***We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.***" (Part of the preamble from our historic declaration of Independence from 1776).

Long before KING and CONGRESS wrote on this subject, Scripture was rife with detailed descriptions of this kind of human community and the relational dynamics that honor our Creator. Paul celebrated one of many descriptions as we will see now in his letter to the **Colossian Christians**.

Read Colossians 3:9-17 NIV

9 Do not lie to each other, since you have *taken off your old self* with its practices 10 and have *put on the new self*, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 *Here [new, beloved community]* there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, *clothe yourselves* with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 *Bear with* each other and *forgive one another* if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues *put on love*, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the *peace of Christ rule* in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the *message of Christ dwell among you richly* as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, *do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus*, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



Today, we are beginning a brand-new winter preaching series entitled **“THIS IS US: The Beloved Community”** (shamelessly borrowing this title from the NBC six-season drama series on family life) as a means of **recognizing the INITIATING work of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2) to form a NEW FAMILY!** For the next six weeks, we’ll be exploring how the Bible flushes out this epic theme and **how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** was **reclaiming and reaffirming** the work and witness of Jesus Christ from two-thousand years earlier! The title **“THIS IS US”** is meant to be both **ACTUAL** (from God’s desired perspective) as well as **ASPIRATIONAL** (from our incomplete and unfinished reality, and heaven’s invitation into discipleship).



<https://www.theafricareport.com/39647/i-have-a-dream-martin-luther-king-jrs-historic-speech-in-full/>

This prophetic **RE-ANNOUNCEMENT** on the steps of the **Lincoln Memorial back on August 28, 1963** re-ignited the hope that the work of Jesus Christ in reconciling the peoples of this world would now be made complete by His followers, the Bride of Christ. The Beloved Community is a global vision for the entire global family. Almost 60 years later from that solemn and sacred day, the tireless work in pursuit of that kingdom dream still continues. Just as King David once said:

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him”

Psalm 24:1 NLT

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. popularized the phrase, the Beloved Community, and gave it a more profound meaning when he envisioned it as a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one’s fellow human beings. For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal but rather a realistic and achievable one that could be attained by a critical mass of people (like you and me) and organizations (like our church family) committed to embodying and advocating for this vision of life together in our broader society.

Long ago, Jesus set out the plan for the fulfillment of this dream. Paul articulates a profound summary in his letter to the Colossian Christians. Here is what we learn from his teaching. **New life in the kingdom as a beloved community always begins with God's declaration.** It is heaven's initiative and not our own. It is God's idea and not ours.

G O D ` S D E C L A R A T I O N

Chosen = Elected

Holy = Set Apart

Beloved = Deeply Valued

God is calling you and me and this **whole world into FAITH**. No one is excluded from this invitation. All peoples are **precious and God's heart** is to save every human being into his **kingdom family (read 2 Peter 3:9)**. Through His forgiveness through Jesus Christ, God can now call all people into new life. God wants to make permanent changes in your life and mine; in our world and in every society.



Nature calls that chrysalis – the Bible calls that metamorphosis, or, TRANSFORMATION! The way we do that is described like changing our clothes. We take off one outfit and put on another. A new wardrobe.

"Here [Kingdom Living] there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all"
Colossians 3:11 NIV

Since we are under new management, and citizens of a new kingdom of beloved and diverse siblings, we have a transformation journey to embrace; an engaged path that leads to peace and wellness for all. Here is the journey that Paul outlines in his letter. As favored heirs and adopted family, God calls us into transformation. **The Holy Spirit will “REDRESS” us in these ways.**

Clothed	→ Holy Spirit Fruits
Bear	→ Patient Endurance
Forgive	→ Gracious Pardon
Wear Love	→ Unconditional Benevolence
Peace Rules	→ One United Body as Family
Message Dwells	→ Study, Admonitions, Singing
Do ALL in Jesus	→ All-Encompassing Scope

CLOTHED: When the Spirit redresses us, we live by the attitudes and relational dispositions of the character of God: That’s what fruits of the Spirit are (Love, Joy Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness and Self Control). What do fruits do? **They establish HARMONY in any community!** (via healthy relationships).

BEAR: When you give others significant worth, and offer them plenty of space and room to grow (processing life’s highs and lows with plenty of complaints, clashes and grievances) (we call that parenthood BTW) – you are engaging in what the Bible calls “Bearing.” All that really means I you **REFUSE TO GIVE UP** on someone and throw in the towel. So you **PATIENTLY ENDURE.**

FORGIVE: To forgive is not to forget, nor to pretend that it was OK or didn’t really matter (because it did matter). To forgive is to offer a **GRACIOUS PARDON** in a spirit that wants to help to heal an old wound. Letting go of a past hurt is one thing. **Healing and restoring a relationship is everything!**

WEAR LOVE: To live by wearing love is to relationally operate with **the bond and glue of TOGETHERNESS.** This reconnecting and rebinding commitment only comes from a spirit of **UNCONDITIOINAL BENEVOLENCE** where we actually wish our detractors, enemies, stereotyped, or demonized

people all of the blessings and favor of equal value and dignity. Agape love is the personified power of the New Kingdom,7heree among other things, "Love keeps no records of wrong" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

PEACE RULES: The shalom of heaven is the completion and fullness of all that we lost and long for in this desolate and broken life. Reconciliation to God, self, others, and the creation is the restorative healing that bridges the social gaps of humanity, calls forth **ONE UNIFIED BODY, and transcends all human differences and divisions to make us ONE FAMILY!** This peace "UMPIRES" or "REFEREES" our life together to always rule in favor of God's pathways to life.

MESSAGE DWELLS: When we place ourselves within reach of these three titans of transformation (1 – of **STUDY** through teaching and learning; 2 – of relational and accountable **ADMONITIONS**; and 3 – of **SINGING** kingdom truths), then we participate and partner in the renewing cycle of being teacher and student for life. To teach is to learn; to learn is to teach.

DO ALL IN JESUS: In the beloved community, the scope and sequence of our whole-life curriculum is meant to be **ALL-ENCOMPASSING**. There should be no discontinuity between our daily lives and our worship and devotion not God. Every thought, word, and deed that proceeds from my life to others around me---should be reflective of heaven's favoring and forgiving grace---in every place, time and context.



Becoming the beloved community means more than making our house **"GATHERED AND ORDERLY."** It means adopting a **NEW VISION** of our identity as **A SUPPOSEDLY DIVERSIFIED PEOPLE (THIS IS US)!** It means being greatly concerned by the segregation of the world which is a collection of empires filled with broken and divided and estranged peoples. Living in

kingdom discipleship means **WELCOMING THE STRANGER** and seeking out diverse relationships. It means breaking down barriers and dividing walls in social constructs that prevent the kingdom of God from flourishing on earth.

Remember, Jesus prayed, "On earth, as it is in heaven." Jesus sacrificed his life so that our lives could be resurrected, chrylialized, and metamorphosized into KINGDOM AGENTS who will "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land" (shout out to John Wesley there). The way we **BUILD the kingdom** is by **BREAKING SOCIAL BARRIERS**. This is what Jesus specialized in.

"Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, *he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us*...so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace"

Ephesians 2:14, 15b CEB



Let me close with this thought and challenge today. Another way theologians think about the **KING-dom** of God is to talk about the **KIN-gdom** of God. The Beloved Community that Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned, the community that Jesus Christ died for and Paul and other truth tellers articulated in scripture, has a **KING AS HEAD (Jesus Christ – Colossians 1:18)** and it also has a **KIN, (FAMILY), BELOVED SIBLINGS** and **FELLOW HEIRS.**

If Jesus prayed “On earth as it is in heaven,” maybe we should start getting together now—owning one another as family---and saying out loud every now and then---



And all of God's people said together---AMEN!