

# Dr. King's Last Sermon

*(The following sermon was delivered by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. shortly before his death on April 4, 1968.)*

Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator — that something we call death.

We all think about it, and every now and then I think about my own death and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think about it in a morbid sense. And every now and then I ask myself what is it that I would want said, and I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day ... I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. And every now and then I wonder what I want them to say.

Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize ... that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have 300 or 400 other awards ... that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school.

I'd like somebody to mention

that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody.

I want you to say that day that I tried to be right and to walk with them. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. And I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major ... say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace ... I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter.

I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. And that's all I want to say.

If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show some-



Coretta Scott King and two of her children at Dr. King's grave site.

body he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I

can spread the message as the Master taught, then my living will not be in vain.

Yes, Jesus, I want to be on your

right or your left side ... not for any selfish reason. I want to be on your right or your left side ... not in terms of some political kingdom or ambition. But I just want to be there in

love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world ... a new world.

## Selected Moments from the Life of the Man They Called King

King responded to the continuing violence in 1964 — the deaths of the three civil rights workers in Mississippi, the ghetto riots in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Philadelphia — in his speech at Oslo, where in December he became the youngest person, at 35, to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

I am mindful that only yesterday in Birmingham, Ala., our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death. I am mindful that only yesterday in Philadelphia, Miss., young people seeking to secure the right to vote were brutalized and murdered. ... Therefore, I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered ... which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize.

After-contemplation, I conclude that this award which I received on behalf of that movement is profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time — the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression.

In March 1965, when he spoke on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol following the tear gas, clubbings and violent deaths in the Selma voter registration campaign and the successful march to Montgomery, he reaffirmed his faith in the nonviolent movement.

Last Sunday we started on a mighty walk from Selma, Ala. ... They told us we wouldn't get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies, but all the world today knows that we are here and that we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama saying, "We ain't goin' to let nobody turn us around."

There never was a moment in American history more honorable and more inspiring than the pilgrimage of clergymen and laymen of every race and faith pouring into Selma to face danger at the side of its embattled Negroes.

Our whole campaign in Alabama has been centered around the right to vote.

We are on the move now. The burning of our churches will not deter us. ... We are on the move now. The beating and killing of our clergymen and young people will not divert us. We are on the move now.

Let us therefore continue our triumph and march. ... Let us march on segregated housing. ... Let us march on segregated schools. ... Let us march on poverty. ... Let us march on ballot boxes.

I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frus-



Dr. Martin Luther King

trating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.

How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow.

How long? Not long. Because the arm of the moral universe ... bends toward justice.

fair and honest in its dealings. ... I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. ... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's

On March 28, 1968, King agreed to lead a march in Memphis of black sanitation workers who went out on strike when they received wages for only two hours on a day when work was canceled because of rain, while white workers received a full day's pay. Black militants disrupted the march, to the distress of King and SCLC leaders, but they returned to Memphis determined to lead a nonviolent demonstration. There were rumors of threats on King's life, but such rumors were not unfamiliar and had shadowed the man since the days and nights of the Montgomery bus boycott 13 years earlier. On April 3, 1968, King delivered his last speech to 2,000 cheering supporters in the Mason Temple of Memphis.

I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period, to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy he's allowed me to be in Memphis. ... We mean business now and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world. And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And that we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

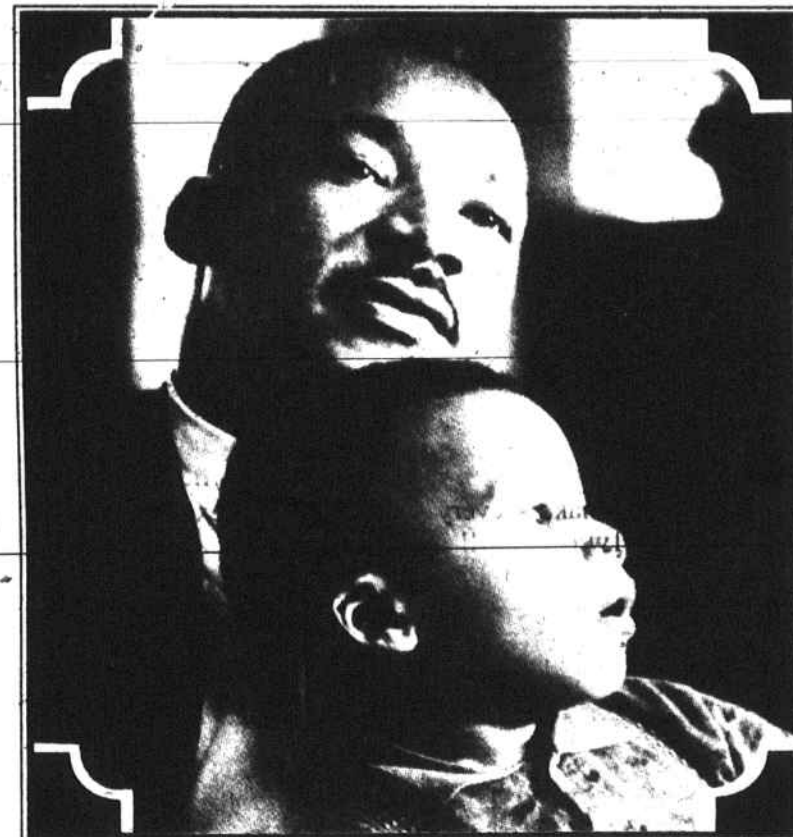
Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we've got to stay together and maintain unity.

The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be

will, and He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you.

But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about any-

thing. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

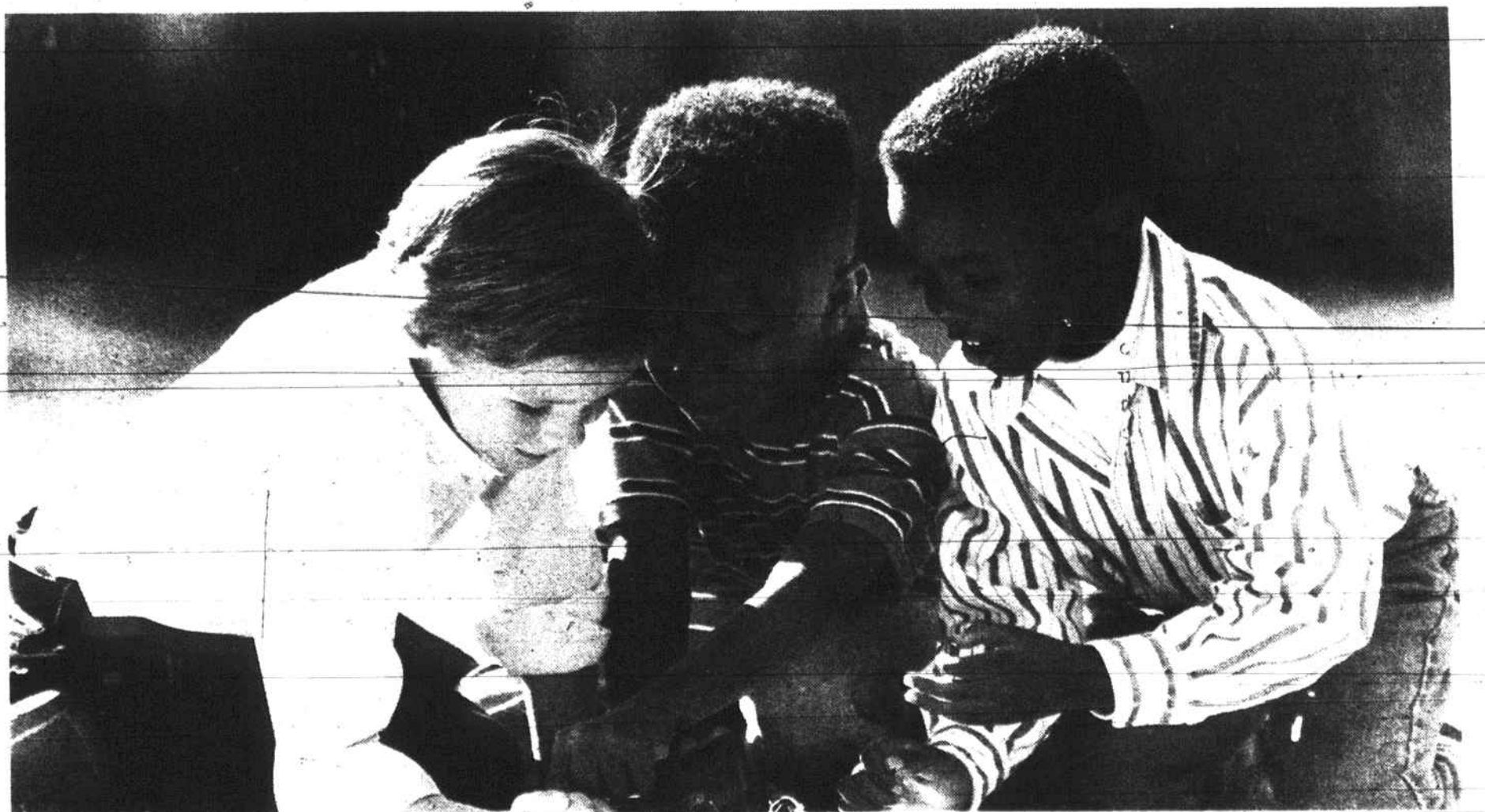


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Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

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