

## “The Beloved Community:” The Application of Dr. King’s Philosophy in the Present Day

Only four days before the brutal assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee, my grandfather, Rev. Canon John S. McDowell Jr., served in a large church service given by Dr. King. Having been a periphery participator in the Civil Rights movement for some time, he was certainly impressed by the non-confrontary, non-violent power of the man before him. However, it was his participation during the Washington D.C. race riots and his work after Dr. King’s death that gave him a true perspective on the issue of racial rights. During the outbreak of the rioting, my grandfather helped to ferry food and medical supplies to a church blocks from the epicenter of the riots in Washington, passing through numerous military checkpoints and roadblocks to reach his destination (these riots eventually led to multiple deaths and the burning of several sections of the city). In addition, he worked as a summer chaplain to the Milledgeville state mental hospital in Georgia which had a reputation as one of the worst mental hospitals in the country. There, he worked with numerous black individuals, who, in his words “were there because of the debilitating pressure put on them in a terribly segregated society (at that time, the hospital and staff dormitory were the only places in Milledgeville that were integrated)” (McDowell). In 1970, he had the opportunity to help a classmate of his from Uganda, one Justin Zake (who had been sent to Alexandria, VA, to avoid being murdered by the Ugandan dictatorship), see the United States, yet he struggled with the “how,” as he said, “I am not sure the two of us would have survived the trip [to the deep south]” (McDowell). These experiences allowed my grandfather to better understand the role Dr. King played in shaping the Civil Rights Movement and the modern society at large, and McDowell still feels as though “we are still in the Civil Rights movement. We are far from treating each person equally -- women are paid significantly less than men for the same job, Hispanics and blacks are paid much less

than Caucasians, and jobs, education opportunities and work equality are not yet realized. There is important work to be done!” (McDowell). That work begins in the Carlisle community and the applications of Dr. King’s philosophy McDowell so vividly remember is a key step in the realization of Dr. King’s beloved community.

In addition to his awe at Dr. King and his messages, McDowell was struck by the adamance that Dr. King had towards non-violence. He stated that “it took special training for participants who, - when faced with dogs, beatings, burnings of buses and cars, threats of being shot or lynched -- responded with non-violence, even at the cost of their life or health” (McDowell). This philosophy is vitally important to the advancement of modern society to Dr. King’s beloved community -- we can never let differences of opinion or belief sway our ability to act amicably towards each other. Only by acting in a peaceful manner towards others can true change occur. In the Carlisle community, this can easily be implemented. We must teach our children to “show respect to every person [they] meet,” a key factor in my grandfather’s upbringing (McDowell). In addition, the peaceful view towards others will help settle disputes amicably; violence rarely solves the world’s problems, yet peace does.

Importantly, McDowell remembers the laser-focus on the confrontation of situations which dramatically exposed the seams of culture. He said, of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, “Dr. King and the other leaders gave support to the protestors -- and publicized the event throughout the country” (McDowell). This focus on the issues at hand will inevitably help those issues to be solved. In Carlisle, there are significant issues and subtle inequality among housing, education, and labor. To truly solve these issues, it is necessary to bring them to the forefront. In the larger world, there are major issues that still need to be solved such as climate change and

global warming, global inequality, poverty, and the continued rise of extremism. Only by bringing these issues to the forefront of the public's minds will the solutions come forward.

The issues that we face in the modern age are vastly different, yet somehow exceptionally similar to the issues faced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. To confront these issues, we must look to history for answers. Though McDowell believes that we are still in a Civil Rights movement, it is still clear that we have made progress over the last 60 years. Now, we must apply the philosophy of Dr. King and the Civil Rights movement to the world at large, tackling global and local issues in order to achieve the beloved community. To start this journey, one may look to the United Nations sustainable development goals, a list of goals set out in 2015 to serve as a benchmark in global issues for the foreseeable future, including “no poverty” and “reduced inequality”. To solve them on a broad scale, we must take them to the forefront of public consciousness, publicizing them just as Dr. King did during the Civil Rights movement. We must take action when necessary, but we must always strive for non-violent confrontation. As McDowell said, “the immediate goal of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s also included confronting the “system” that treated black people as less than equal human beings, to the extent of threatening the lives of blacks” (McDowell). In the modern age, we must tackle not only this system but we must dismantle the systems in place in opposition to the beloved community through peaceful protest, amicable debate, and the publicizing of issues, the most core philosophies of Dr. King's belief.

#### Works Cited

McDowell, John S., Jr. Interview. 11 Dec. 2019.

