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Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

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April 2020



Julie Lonneman

I Saw the Light of Jesus

By Katie Aikins

I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Hope in the Lord, be strong and take courage, hope in the Lord. (Psalm 27)

Last week, I flew to Georgia to visit my friend Jimmy Meders who was then on death row and had been for 32 years. I had been writing and visiting with Jimmy for the past 12 years and he had become a good friend. I'm grateful to the Open Door Community and specifically Ed Weir, who gave me Jimmy's name years ago when I asked who might want a pen pal.

Jimmy was scheduled to be executed on January 16th. I arrived the Wednesday morning before so that I could spend time with him. I had the privilege then also of meeting several members of his family, including his mother, Faye, who has been a steady support throughout his life.

On Thursday morning, the day of his execution, I realized that I didn't have my cross around my neck. I usually wear the cross I received at my confirmation for prison or hos-

that kind of contextualized way. Meaning we don't often ask, "Where is crucifixion happening in our world today?" "Where is it being experienced?" The cross has become sanitized — a metaphorical, sentimental symbol rather than what it was in Jesus' time, an actual instrument of torture and execution. We don't tend to think of the ways that we as an American Empire use (and have used) forms of torture and death on poor people just as the Roman Empire did.

What is more acceptable in our country is to make dreadfully misguided connections to the cross. For example, in December 2019, during a debate on the house floor before the vote on the two articles of impeachment of President Trump, Trump's impeachment was compared to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. One lawmaker argued that "Jesus was treated more fairly during his trial before Pontius Pilate before he was crucified, than Donald Trump is being treated by the Democrats."

It is acceptable by many Christians in a country like ours to espouse a Christianity whereby Trump — a powerful, wealthy, white man, who is also overtly mean, racist and misogynistic — is seen as suffering just like the tortured

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what I'm saying to you this morning is that *there on death row is the cross.*
Crucifixion is happening on death row.

pital visits. It has mostly sentimental value, but is significant to me because it reminds me of a time in my life when I said "yes" to God and that I am still trying to keep that promise as I live my life from day to day. I thought for sure that I had taken the cross off to put through the security scanning machine at the prison. But I never found it. We even asked the guards if they had seen it, but no one could find it.

Somewhere there on death row in Jackson, is that cross.

I suppose, in another deeper sense, what I'm saying to you this morning is that *there on death row is the cross.* Crucifixion is happening on death row.

It is what some, including theologian James Cone, have termed "legal lynchings." The cross is there on death row.

Many Christians don't tend to think about the cross in

Christ. The cross is not only a sentimentalized symbol of piety, but has become in our country just another tool that white people use to justify our seemingly constant need to see ourselves as the victims, and our need to remove ourselves from any guilt or responsibility in holding up the system of white supremacy that continues to crucify the poor and especially black and brown people.

It is less acceptable in a country like ours to espouse a Christianity where we see people like Jimmy or others on death row in the image of Jesus, even though they are *literally* facing their executions by the state just like Jesus did. Have you ever wondered why we have such a hard time seeing this connection? Why do we not see the cross on death row?

I Saw the Light of Jesus *continued on page 6*

Foot Theology

Amos 5:21-24

By Nibs Stroupe

She got on a train near Memphis in 1884 on the way to her teaching job, in which she earned income to support her siblings. She bought a ticket for the Ladies Car and sat in that car. The white conductor came by and told her that the car was reserved for whites only and that she would have to move to the "Colored" car, the car where both men and women and smokers traveled. Ida Wells explained that she had requested and been sold a first-class ticket for the Ladies Car, and she was not moving. The conductor said, "Oh, yes, you are," and he put his hand on her arm to move her. She responded, "Oh, no, I'm not," and she bit the conductor on his hand and braced herself for a fight. The conductor saw that he was outmatched, so he went to get some other white men, and they put her off the train.

Wells sued in Memphis city court, saying that the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad had violated her civil rights established in the Fourteenth Amendment. The judge in that court was a person classified as "white," and he was also a former Union soldier. He ruled in her favor and awarded her \$500 in damages. Now, \$500 is a lot of money today, but it was a *whole* lot of money back then! The railroad appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court, and they overturned the ruling, indicating that public accommodations were a federal, not a state, issue. Ida Wells was crestfallen at this ruling and wrote in her diary: "I had hoped for such great things from my suit for my people generally. I have firmly believed all along that the law was on our side and would, when we appealed to it, give us justice. I feel shorn of that belief and utterly discouraged, and just now if it were possible, would gather my race in my arms and fly far away with them."

She used the powerful image of flight from her African American heritage, but fortunately for all of us, she did not take flight. She took fight, and in her fighting, she went on to become one of the most powerful witnesses for justice and equity in American history. If you want to learn more about her, you can read *Passionate for Justice: Ida B. Wells as Prophet for Our Time*, written by Dr. Catherine Meeks and me.

Ida Wells' witness was powerful, and it was not in vain. Seventy-one years after her ejection from the train in Memphis, another Black woman, Rosa Parks — a well-trained activist in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her seat on a bus in a section reserved for those classified as "white." It was December 1, 1955. Unlike Ida B. Wells, she was non-violent. She had been trained in nonviolent resistance at Highlander Folk School and tutored there the previous summer by Septima Clark. So she was ready, and she was arrested.

Her arrest was a spark that set fire to the smoldering civil

Foot Theology *continued on page 4*

A Courageous Witness for Peace

The Kings Bay Plowshares

By Rosalie G. Riegle

Acting on the 50th anniversary of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, a group of seven Christian activists broke into the Kings Bay Naval Base in St. Mary's, Georgia on April 4, 2018. They chose that date to call attention to MLK's triple threats of nuclearism, racism and materialism, all capable of destroying our world, and carried with them MLK's statement that "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world is my own government." Calling themselves the Kings Bay Plowshares Seven, they acted as part of the on-going nuclear resistance movement called Plowshares, started in 1980 by Phil Berrigan and others of Jonah House in Baltimore.

Kings Bay houses six nuclear submarines, each having the power to destroy all life on earth. Along with the eight other nuclear submarines kept near Seattle, Washington, our country holds in thrall every nation in the world, including our supposed allies. We in the U.S. can't imagine the enormity of the destruction even one nuclear missile carries, and so we stick our heads in the sand and don't think about it, even if we profess to be peacemakers and follow the nonviolence of Jesus. Plowshares activists not only think about and study it, but they act to witness their knowledge and carry the action forward in a trial and the redemptive suffering of incarceration.

After several hours in the base, the activists were arrested, incarcerated at the Brunswick Detention Center and charged with conspiracy for planning the action and working to make sure no one was injured by their symbolic destruction, trespassing by cutting through a wire fence, and depredation and destruction of government property by

pouring their own blood and hammering on a metal shrine to the weapons with household hammers.

The group included Liz McAlister, wife of the late Phil Berrigan; Clare Grady, Ithaca Catholic Worker; Martha Hennessy and Carman Trotta, New York Catholic Worker; Mark Colville, Amistad Catholic Worker in New Haven, Connecticut; Fr. Steve Kelly SJ from the San Jose Bay area of California and part of the Redwood City Catholic Worker community; and Patrick O'Neill, Fr. Mulholland Catholic Worker, Garner, North Carolina. Martha Hennessy is Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day's granddaughter and like others in the group, has served prison terms for earlier Plowshares or other resistance actions.

Some remained in jail until their trial in October of 2019; some bonded out for medical reasons and to spend time with family and community as they faced up to ten years in prison. Complicated legal delays caused the judge to rule at the very last minute that a theologian, an esteemed legal expert, and a Roman Catholic Bishop would not be allowed to testify as to their compelling religious beliefs.

At their jury trial, attended by supporters from many states and countries, the defendants said they entered the base not to commit a crime but to prevent one. Defendant Mark Colville told supporters: "Once again, a federal court has plainly turned a blind eye to the criminal and murderous enterprise from which the Pentagon has repeatedly refused to desist for the past 73 years. According to

international and constitutional law, both of which are binding and superseding law in all U.S. jurisdictions, the building and possession of first-strike nuclear weapons is a crime." Defense attorneys pointed out that "If the defendants took their actions in North Korea or Iran, the U.S. government would hail their actions." Nevertheless, after three days of testimony, the jury took less than an hour to convict all seven.

Then another kind of waiting began. Hundreds of supportive letters have been sent to the presiding judge. A petition asking the U.S. Attorney General to dismiss the charges has been signed by thousands. National and international media have spread the word. But as of March 1, a sentencing date has not been set.

There is still much we can do to break our denial and to help them. Join the Facebook group *Kings Bay Plowshares* and follow www.mukeresister.org for up-to-the-minute updates. Visit <https://www.kingsbayplowshares7.org/> for the latest details and, most

importantly, for ways you can carry the witness to your own community by inviting the Kings Bay Seven or other experts to speak.

For more information on past Plowshares actions, see the two oral histories of war resisters that I collected and edited, *Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2012) and *Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace* (Wipf and Stock, 2013). If you have questions about the nonviolence of a Plowshares action, a nonviolence the courts often but not always refuse to recognize, email me at: riegle@svsu.edu.

Please pray for the safety of these brave nuclear resisters and contribute to their defense if you can. ✚

Rosalie Riegle is a grandmother, an oral historian and emerita in English from Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan, now living in Evanston, Illinois, and active with *Su Casa Catholic Worker on the South Side of Chicago*.



Photograph | Kings Bay Plowshares 7

The Kings Bay Plowshares 7: (left to right) Elizabeth McAlister; Fr. Stephen Kelly, Carman Trotta, Mark Colville, Martha Hennessy, Clare Grady and Patrick O'Neill.

HOSPITALITY

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Eduard Loring and Murphy Davis at home in Baltimore.

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Please join us on **Facebook** for the continuing journey of the **Open Door Community** in **Baltimore**. Thank you. David, Eduard and Murphy.

Audacious Abigail

Fighting Fire with Food

By Joyce Hollyday

This is the second in a series of reflections on biblical women, launched in January 2020. It is based on 1 Samuel 25:2-42.

The world is polarized. Insults have been exchanged and will not go unaddressed. The order goes out from David: “Every man strap on his sword!” The threat is clear: No one on the enemy side will be left standing when this is all over. The race to total slaughter is on.

But look there, on the horizon. What’s that? A woman on a donkey. And what’s that she has? More donkeys, loaded up with a couple hundred fig cakes and loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, some wine and grain, a load of mutton. Isn’t it just like a woman to show up with food in a time of crisis?

But this is more than just the ancient equivalent of a casserole delivered to a grieving friend or a pot of soup offered to a family in need. This is absurd. This is a woman riding into a war zone to speak to the enemy commander — with an extravagant feast for him and his men. Audacious Abigail boldly but humbly brings her peace offering and talks David into saving himself from guilt and grief, convincing him to change course. He’s smart enough to see her good sense and bless her for it.

Jesus’ command for us to love our enemies is clear, but there’s probably nothing that goes more against the grain of

Jesus’ command for us to love our enemies is clear, but there’s probably nothing that goes more against the grain of human nature than loving people who have threatened or wronged us.

human nature than loving people who have threatened or wronged us. Abigail loved her enemy — tangibly, courageously, sacrificially. She met violence and vengeance with generosity and graciousness — and thus averted massive bloodshed. And...she got a new husband out of the deal, when her surly first one essentially died of a heart attack when he learned what she had done. Unfortunately, this didn’t turn out to be exactly a fairy-tale ending for Abigail, but that’s another story.

The story of war is one that has been with us since the beginning of human history. “Every man pick up his rock...pull out his knife...throw his spear...strap on his sword...lift his rifle...launch his grenade...drop his bomb.” The ever-more-sophisticated headlong rush to violence seems impossible to stop. But every once in a while, someone comes along and shows us another way.

Three years ago, I had an unforgettable conversation in Charleston, South Carolina, with Louise — who was weaving an exquisite sweetgrass basket in her lap, in the same way that she had done for several decades — and her daughter Marcella, who was crafting dolls out of palmetto branches and African fabric. When I mentioned the stop that my partner, Bill, and I had just made at Mother Emmanuel AME Church, where a gathering of flowers, wreaths and prayers honored the nine members recently murdered there during a Bible study, both Marcella’s eyes and mine welled up with tears.

“That boy is a mother’s child,” Marcella said, referring to Dylann Roof, the perpetrator of the massacre. “And he’s God’s child,” she added. “I pray for the people who lost their lives, but I know where they are. We need to pray for the one who’s lost. You know he suffered terrible things to do what he did.” She paused and then said, “Jesus left the ninety-nine



Abigail | Beth Baca

sheep to go after the one that was lost.”

In the aftermath of that massacre, and several before and since, I felt overwhelmed by so much anger that I had difficulty accepting such gracious generosity of spirit, which was expressed by many members of Mother Emmanuel. But I believe they know the truth. And courageously, against all

odds, they live by this truth — inviting us all to be people of mercy rather than vengeance.

When I was in South Africa years ago observing its Truth and Reconciliation process — during which perpetrators of the massive and brutal massacres, jailing and torture of people under apartheid admitted their crimes — I heard the amazing story of one small, isolated village. In an attack on it by the South African army, more than sixty people were killed — all villagers except for one soldier. Far from home and unable to carry his body, the other soldiers asked if they could bury their comrade in the community’s graveyard. A leader of the community replied, “You have taught us that there are Black schools and white schools; that there are Black neighborhoods and white neighborhoods; that there are Black graveyards and white graveyards. This is a Black graveyard.” He directed the soldiers to a piece of land just outside the cemetery fence as a burial spot.

Twenty years later, at a Truth and Reconciliation hearing, the victims and soldiers told their stories. The next day, before leaving the village, the soldiers decided to visit the grave of their comrade, but they couldn’t find it. At the end of the previous day’s hearing, the men of the village had worked through the night to move the graveyard’s fence to include the soldier. “The truth has been spoken,” one man explained to the other soldiers. “Forgiveness was asked for and given. We are prepared to move the fence.”

The question is: Are we prepared to move the fence? To tear down dividing walls and build up something new? To show up in war zones — both the ones in the world and the ones in our own hearts — with food instead of firepower? ✦

Joyce Hollyday, a writer and pastor living in Vermont, has been a friend of the Open Door for four decades. Her blog can be found at www.joycehollyday.com.

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HOSPITALITY

for your breakfast!
Sarah and Davis Ramseur
get their news before
heading to school!



Sarah and Davis Ramseur are the children of long time community member Lauren Cogswell Ramseur and her husband Doug. (see page 8 for Lauren’s photograph)



Lauren Cogswell Ramseur

Foot Theology: Amos 5:21-24 *continued from page 1*

rights movement, and the women of the NAACP in Montgomery made sure that that spark was not lost, but caught fire, not allowing the men to tamp it down like they had in the case of Claudette Colvin. Led by Joann Robinson, a professor at Alabama State, the women spent all night writing and mimeographing a flyer — for those of you who are young, that was the social media of their day and in my young adult days. That flyer called for a one-day boycott of the Montgomery buses on the next Monday. And, you should know, the male ministers of their churches were not greatly pleased that the women stepped out and took the lead on this. But, to their credit, the ministers joined in publicly and urged their congregants on Sunday to support and to participate in the boycott. As we all know, that one-day boycott was a stunning success, and it lasted not just one day but a whole year, ending when the Supreme Court ruled that segregated buses were unconstitutional.

Out of this movement came the rise of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. He thought that he had his life lined up pretty well — getting a doctorate degree, his daddy waiting for him in a prestigious pulpit in Atlanta. He thought that he had it lined up, but God had other plans for him. He reluctantly agreed to allow his name to be placed in nomination as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which was coordinating the boycott. He would lead this Montgomery boycott, and he knew that it took “foot theology;” he knew that it took many people to make it work. Later on in his career, he would often quote one of his church members, Mother Pollard. She was 72, and after several weeks of walking to work instead of taking the bus, he offered to arrange rides for her, but she replied “Pastor, my feet is tired, but my soul is rested.”

From here, the leadership and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. took off. For the next thirteen years, he would be a powerful and inspirational and controversial leader in the civil rights movement. He was not the only leader; there were other powerful leaders like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker and Malcolm X. Another leader, an unsung one named Bob Moses, described Dr. King as a huge wave on a sea of activists. The wave would not be possible without the sea, but he was a huge wave.

And we’re here this weekend to celebrate his 91st birthday as a national holiday. I always give thanks for God’s sense of humor; it was President Ronald Reagan who was coerced into signing the legislation that made Dr. King’s birthday a national holiday.

I want to suggest four reasons why Dr. King’s legacy is so important to us in our time. First, he was God-centered. Now, a lot of us claim to be God-centered, but our foot theology reveals what we are really centered on — some of us on race, some on patriarchy, some on money, some of us on power — the list seems endless. Dr. King had all of those struggles like we do, but he sought to put God at the center. He wasn’t afraid to ask the hard questions about his own foot theology. One of the central Biblical passages for him was the Hebrew scripture text from the prophet Amos: “Take away from me the noise of your songs, I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (5:23-24)

Those of us in the church ought to notice how offensive this prophecy is! We’ve heard some fine prayers in worship

today; we’ve heard some powerful songs of praise and adoration today; and of course, there are always moving sermons here at Antioch, but Amos the prophet is blunt: God does not want to hear those kinds of things; God does not even open the door to hear those kinds of things; God does not accept those kinds of things unless they are based in justice and righteousness. “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Dr. King often quoted this Amos passage because he did not want to accept the split in American Christianity between the spirituality of “me and Jesus” and justice’s “us and Jesus.” In fact, Amos (and Dr. King) meant it this way: If all you got is “me and Jesus,” you ain’t got Jesus. Let me say it again: If you only have “me and Jesus,” you ain’t got Jesus. It’s got to be “us and Jesus,” or it’s not Jesus. We white Christians started the split between spirituality and Jesus because we wanted to hold people as slaves and still call ourselves Christians. We said that all God cared about was “me and Jesus.” All God cared about was getting us into heaven when we died. God didn’t really care about all that justice stuff. We white folks started it, but some of y’all have bought into it too. But Amos and Dr. King would have none of it. “Take all this worship stuff away from me,” Amos quotes God as saying.



Mary Garrity



Montgomery County Sheriff's Department

“Base your life together in justice and equity, and then I’ll be glad to hear your prayers and listen to your songs.”

The second reason that Dr. King’s legacy is so important is that he was a great visionary and prophet. He could see deeper and farther than most of us — he had a wider view. He saw race and class and violence and war in an interconnected way. He didn’t quite get there on gender, but he would have if he had not been assassinated. He understood the connectedness of all things. And that voice of his, wow, what a voice! He was a great visionary, calling us to seek that same kind of vision in our time. In the best essay that I’ve ever read on Dr. King, the poet June Jordan had this to say about Dr. King:

And I remember listening to WBAL-FM radio in 1963 the way my parents long ago used to listen to AM radio broadcasts of the Joe Louis fights, only I was following the evolution of the Civil Rights

Revolution: I was following the liberation of my life according to the Very Reverend Dr. King. And when, one afternoon, that fast-talking, panic-stricken newscaster in Birmingham reported the lunging killer police dogs and the atrocious hose water, and I could hear my people screaming while the newscaster shouted out the story of my people, . . . I knew that we would win. And before those demonstrations and underneath the melee and after the bleeding and the lockups and the singing and the prayers, there was this magical calm voice leading us, unarmed, into the violence of White America. And that voice was not the voice of God. But did it not seem to be the very voice of righteousness? That voice was not the voice of God. But does it not, even now, amazingly penetrate/reverberate/illuminate: a sound, a summoning, somehow divine? ¹

And third, Dr. King believed in “foot theology.” He put his body on the line. He didn’t just talk the talk, he walked the walk. He preached and protested and negotiated for justice and equity. He was clubbed and stabbed and shoved and shot at and jailed and spat upon and cursed and spied on. But he kept talking, he kept walking, still he did foot theology. In the public sphere, his alter-ego and rival seemed to be Malcolm X, but for all his tough talk, Minister Malcolm was never arrested for anything except breaking and entering to steal someone else’s property. Dr. King was arrested so many times in protesting injustice that he lost count of the number. Dr. King did foot theology and, though his feet got tired, his soul was rested.

The fourth part of Dr. King’s impact was his invitation to everybody, especially white people like me, to do the soul work necessary for foot theology. He invited everybody to see ourselves and one another in a new light, in the light of the God movement, in the light of being God-centered, in the light of foot theology. He believed in the power of love, and he believed that love was at the center of life. The more that he was beaten and arrested and threatened by white society, the more he moved to include both love and justice as central parts of foot theology, as central parts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The great preacher and teacher from Arkansas, my home state, Dr. James Cone, once put it like this in his fine

book on Dr. King and Malcolm X: “Malcolm began with justice and moved towards love, while Martin began with love and moved towards justice.” Dr. King put it this way in his groundbreaking speech “A Time to Break Silence,” when he publicly announced his opposition to the Vietnam War in 1967:

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift

from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

Boy, we need to hear and to heed these words TODAY, some 53 years later. Is all this ancient history? Ida Wells — 160 years ago! Martin Luther King, Jr. — 50 years ago! But all of you in this sanctuary today know that this is not ancient history. Rather it is always contemporary history in America. Those same forces that threw Ida Wells off the



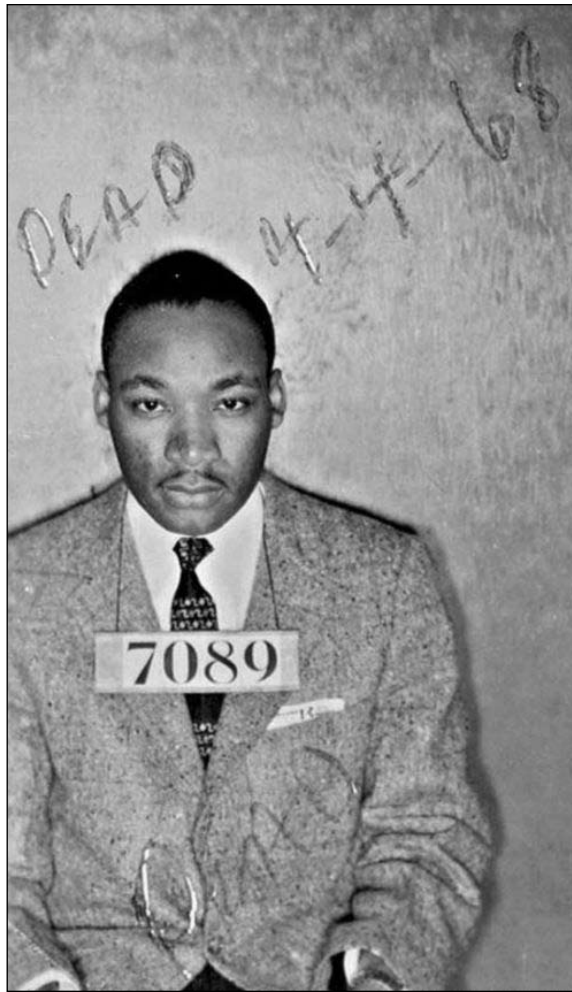
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Don't Sanitize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

By Nibs Stroupe

I was working in the library at Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes College) on April 4, 1968. When my shift ended a little bit after six p.m., one of my friends told me that Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot and killed. I was shocked. I had been working in the sanitation workers' strike, which brought King to Memphis, but I had largely dismissed him as irrelevant because of his twin emphasis on radical nonviolence and the possibility that white people could be redeemed. I've learned a lot since then, and in this anniversary month of the 52nd year of his assassination, I think that the most prescient tribute to King and his legacy comes from the finest essay on King that I have ever read: "The Mountain and the Man Who Was Not God," by June Jordan. It is adapted from a speech she gave at Stanford in 1987.

Almost 20 years ago, Dr. King, standing alone, publicly demanded that England and the United States both act to isolate South Africa through unequivocal severing of financial or any other connection with that heinous regime. In that same year, Dr. King stood forth, opposed to the war in Vietnam, and thereby suffered the calumny and castigation of his erstwhile peers, as well as the hysterical censure of his outright foes. Evaluating America as "the greatest purveyor of violence in our time," in 1967 Dr. King, with a breadth of determination and rectitude unimaginable even now, undertook the launching of a revolution aimed against that violence, a revolution pitted against America's inequities, a revolution riveted against an American poverty of the spirit that allowed us to



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uproot, and decimate, a host of strangers while denying basic necessities to the homeless here at home.

In remembering Dr. King, let us not clean him up, but rather let us pick up his mantle. Let us find our voices for justice and equity, as he found his. ✠

Transfiguration

By Weldon Nisly

No easy responses to transfiguration. Yet I am inspired by Jesus' transfiguration as a special revelation not only of Jesus but The Way of/with Jesus. Let me share a personal and very mystical/real transfiguration revelation/encounter for me. When we were injured in Iraq on March 29, 2003, near Rutba in western Iraq, a doctor and nurse and physician's assistant and ambulance driver (all Iraqi Muslim men) took care of us and wouldn't let us pay for their life-saving care for us. When our CPT teammates in the other car (a GMC Suburban) returned to Rutba and found us, some Iraqi men carried me on a stretcher to the car. They stood there holding me on the stretcher by the car trying to figure out how to get me from the stretcher and lay me on the middle seat of the Suburban without injuring me further or causing more pain.

The bright afternoon sun was shining in my eyes and blinding me. Suddenly one of the men holding the stretcher by my side noticed the bright sun shining in my eyes. Looking down at me with a beaming smile, he held up his hand to shield my eyes. I smiled gratefully back at him. But what I really saw was the sun bathing his head in bright sunlight so that his head glowed in a brilliant halo. I knew I was seeing Jesus transfigured in that man and moment. I don't remember anything about how they laid me on the middle seat. The next thing I remember is that when I was lying on the car seat, this same man came around to the other side of the car, opened the door, leaned down and kissed me on both cheeks and said, "God will take care of you." It was the only time I really saw Jesus transfigured! ✠

The book about our 2003 and 2010 journeys to Iraq is *The Gospel of Rutba: War, Peace and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq*, by Greg Barrett (Orbis Books, 2012).

After 40 years of Mennonite Church ministry that included community, pastoral and peace ministries, Weldon Nisly currently devotes himself to Contemplative JustPeace building and work with Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is a Benedictine Oblate. His life is dedicated to the abolition of war. Weldon serves half-time on the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team and also was on the CPT Palestine team in Hebron in September-October 2017 and August-September 2018.

Foot Theology: Amos 5:21-24 *continued from page 4*

train, arrested Rosa Parks on the bus and killed Martin Luther King in Memphis are still with us, still trying to force us back to a time when white people, especially white males, ruled supreme. This is why we need foot theology so badly right now.

While there are many ways to do foot theology, I want to briefly suggest three ways that we can begin to do this in relation to King's legacy.

First, let's not sanitize Dr. King and clean him up. Let's not make him a drinker of Coca-Cola, or a user of Ivory soap. Let's not make him a figure at \$1,000-a-plate dinners. Let us recall that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called him the most dangerous man in America. Indeed, he was killed in Memphis because he was connecting the dots between economics and race and poverty and war. Let us remember how deep and radical his vision was, and let us then seek to find our place in that vision.

Second, let us remember his favorite Old Testament verse: "Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Let us not split justice away from spirituality. Let us seek to weave them together, as Amos did, as Jesus did, as Ida Wells did, as Martin Luther King did. Let us be about foot theology. Let us feed people who are hungry, but let us also ask those in power why people don't have

food. Let us house the homeless, but let us also ask those in power why people don't have places to live. Let us visit those in prison, but let us also ask those in power why we lock up more of our population than any other nation in the world. Let us practice foot theology.

And, finally, if we're scratching our heads and wondering where to begin, let us listen to the powerful words of Dr. King in his greatest sermon of them all, the sermon that was played at his funeral, "The Drum Major Instinct:"

And so Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important — wonderful. If you want to be recognized — wonderful. If you want to be great — wonderful. But recognize that {he} who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's your new definition of greatness.

And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know

the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.

Foot theology. Let us go find our place in this great cloud of witnesses, whatever our status, no matter what the world tells us or we tell ourselves. Whether we're walking on the road or sitting in a wheelchair or stuck in a bed, we can find our foot theology. We can find our voice, we can find our way to be drum majors for justice. Let us practice foot theology.

Amen. ✠

¹ June Jordan, *Technical Difficulties*, Pantheon Books, 1992, pp. 106-107.

This sermon was delivered at Antioch AME Church, Stone Mountain, Georgia on January 19, 2020 and can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/OjBdNUEShtw>. Nibs Stroupe is a long-time friend of the Open Door; retired pastor and author of Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision. He and Catherine Meeks are authors of Passionate for Justice, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnote.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)

I Saw the Light of Jesus *continued from page 1*

During one conversation I had with Jimmy last week, we were talking about his case. And Jimmy leaned back in his chair, and he said, “Y’know these people who have the power to condemn me to death, they’re still mad about losing the Civil War.”

We laughed. It was a humorous moment in a tense time. Jimmy articulated a deep truth there. The reason we don’t see these connections between Jesus, the cross and death row is because, as James Baldwin says, “we carry history within us, we are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.”

We don’t see the cross on death row for similar reasons that white people haven’t been able to see the lynching of Black Americans as crucifixions. James Cone says that white theologians in the past century have written thousands of books about Jesus’ cross without ever seeing the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of Black people. Cone says, “One must suppose that in order to feel comfortable in the Christian faith, whites needed theologians to interpret the gospel in a way that would not require them to acknowledge white supremacy as America’s greatest sin. . . . Whites could claim a Christian identity without feeling the need to oppose slavery, segregation, and lynching as a contradiction of the gospel for America.” (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, pg. 159)

According to Cone, if we are to understand the meaning of the cross of Jesus in North America, we need to see the crucifixion as a first-century lynching. Otherwise the cross will become a symbol of “abstract sentimental piety.”

And we need to see how lynchings and Jim Crow morphed into our current racist criminal justice system, and the death penalty is part of this morphing. It is the ultimate demonization of mostly poor Black men who are the death penalty’s victims.

When I got to the prison, I had been warned to be prepared for the last hour of visitation. Things would become tense and militarized at the prison. I was warned to be prepared for an intimidating show of weapons. As the visiting hours come to an end on the day of an execution, you will see guards with machine guns, guards lining the driveway leading up to the entrance of the prison. In the small grassy area outside the prison, a section is roped off where press and protestors against the execution can gather for a vigil that evening. We were preparing for this. And there is another section on the other side that is roped off for people who come in support of the death penalty and the execution. People don’t tend to come onto that side very much anymore, but I was told that section was also the section where the Klan used to gather back in the day. *History is literally present in all that we do.*

We who were there gathered to support Jimmy, to pray with him, to be with him for his final hours, felt like we were being swept up in a kind of liturgy of death around us. It was like everything was working to remind us and Jimmy of his condemnation in the eyes of the state and our country.

But thank God that I am here today not just to share about what is wrong, but to share about how the light of Christ, the light of God can break through the shadows of death, even in the midst of a well-rehearsed liturgy of death.

On Thursday morning, the same morning I realized I had lost my cross, Jimmy’s mother had motioned for me to come over to her. She grabbed my hand and looked me in the

eye and said, “I was praying this morning. I saw a light come in through the window. I knew it was the light of Jesus and he told me that we were gonna hear good news today.”

My heart didn’t rejoice, it sank. I thought to myself how deeply I wanted her experience to be true. But I couldn’t help but think about how much greater the pain and disappointment would be if she was wrong. Jimmy would be executed and the light of Jesus that she thought she saw was. . . well. . . something else? Worst-case scenario is it would lead her to more despair and a belief that God must not actually be on our side or ever on the side of people like her son on death row. I was nervous about how her pain would be all the worse if she was wrong.

As hours passed, we took turns visiting with Jimmy. Jimmy and I read Psalm 27. We talked about how, when the world forsakes you, when false accusations rise against you, breathing violence down your neck. . . when an army encamps against you and war rises up against you. . . then and even then, the Lord is our Light and our salvation. “The Lord will hide us in his tent and shelter us from trouble.”

Left: Jimmy Meders after his release from Death Row.

Below: Jimmy Meders’ family, friends and legal team at New Hope House following the granting of clemency. Katie Aikins is second from the left in the front row.



New Hope House

This poet speaking in Psalm 27 is a companion to anyone who has felt condemned by the state, by their family, by the world, and finds simultaneously their acceptance and belonging in the sight of God.

It felt good to come alongside this poet and to remember that the state does not own you, the world does not define you, and even if the authorities destroy your body, God will take you up. This is the confidence of this poet in Psalm 27.

But then at 1:10 p.m., the deputy warden came into the waiting area. There were several lawyers there; Jimmy’s aunt and her husband; Mary Catherine, a dear friend and a fierce advocate for folks on death row and their families and loved ones. Only five people were allowed to visit Jimmy at a time, and so we were in the waiting area while Jimmy visited with other family members.

“Circumstances have changed,” said the deputy warden. “Your visiting hours will end at two p.m. today.”

“What?” *What?* “We have until three p.m. to visit Jimmy,” we said. “You can’t rob us of one more hour to be with him!”

One lawyer interrupted: “Can you tell us what circumstances have changed? Was Jimmy granted clemency?”

The deputy warden quietly answered, “Yes.”

And no sooner did “yes” leave his lips, but screams of joy erupted in the room, tears flowed from our eyes and from all on his defense team. Even lawyers were crying! Jimmy’s aunt wept in her chair in her husband’s arms, saying repeatedly, “Thank you Jesus, thank you!”

I’m not sure I have ever experienced such deep relief and joy in the midst of what I thought was going to be one of the worst days in my life and in the lives of all of us there.

The odd part of this story is that the deputy warden had to shush us and say “don’t do that,” because Jimmy hadn’t received the news yet. And he had to receive it from his primary legal team who were still driving from Atlanta to Jackson. So some of us in the waiting room knew, but Jimmy, his mom and his sister who were visiting in the other room would have to wait another 20 minutes for the legal team to arrive to hear the news.

This truly was a miracle of mercy. We had been waiting

for a word from the Board of Pardons and Parole and hadn’t heard anything yet. There wasn’t a lot of hope of clemency for Jimmy since historically the board has been so unmerciful, so wed to its liturgy of death. Jimmy was the first person to receive clemency in Georgia since 2014 and only the tenth since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976. It doesn’t happen often.

I’m so grateful that Jimmy has already been moved to another medium-security prison outside of Atlanta, where he will hopefully have an opportunity to work in an auto body shop like he was doing 32 years ago.

Faye, Jimmy’s mother, didn’t hesitate to remind me later that evening about the light she had seen from Jesus. “I told you we were gonna hear good news.”

It’s hard to express the gratitude and joy I have today that God allowed me to be a witness to the light of Jesus revealed to this woman whose son had been condemned to death for 32 years; the gratitude and joy I have to be

witness to this miracle of mercy and to know that my friend’s life can continue with purpose.

Now my prayer is that this miracle of mercy that we experienced will become less of an impossibility in people’s lives and more of a possibility. Because the liturgy of death, the reality of crucifixion, is currently the norm. Liberation theologian Jon Sobrino says that our challenge in every age is “to take the crucified down from the cross.”

To do this, we have to stop seeing the cross as an abstract symbol of piety. We have to see the cross. We have to ask, where is it? We have to see the crucified in our midst as real people. Because God is on the side of the condemned. God has always been there. ✠

This sermon was delivered January 26, 2020 at Tabernacle United Church in Philadelphia. Rev. Katie Aikins is a minister in the United Church of Christ and currently serves as pastor of Tabernacle United Church in Philadelphia. Katie is married to Heather Barger (former Resident Volunteer at ODC) and is co-momma to two-year-old Oscar. (katieaikins80@gmail.com)

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Hi, Miss you too although you and Murphy are constantly in our thoughts and guide the work that both Peter and I do now. We are so proud of Oliver and Ellis. Oliver and I have many conversations about radical love and resistance. I am farming and work to address food inequity with my students. We have partnered with a few other communities: the Metro Atlanta Transitional Center (where we grow food and teach agricultural skills to women who are finishing the last portion of their sentence) and Thomasville Heights Elementary school farm (where we have managed to convert their sports field to a farm and the students grow food for their community). Despite the disinvestment and isolation these communities have faced for generations, we are trying to build relationships between our communities and make room for their leaders to have a voice.

We are starting to see some positive social change and the students see themselves as change makers — it's quite beautiful. We have raised over \$200,000 for jobs and support to start and run these farms and last year we grew and distributed over 4,500 pounds of food.

You and Murphy are responsible for all that we do. You ripped away our miseducation and replaced it with enlightenment. It's still a process to resist the racism that permeates us all but at least we learned that it's there and we can fight against it.

I hope Murphy is well and please give her our love.

Tania Herbert

Decatur, Georgia

Dear Ed and Murphy,

I sat down this morning for prayer after a hectic morning of kido fighting and lunch packing. I was reminded of you all by the edition of *Hospitality* on my table — this one about ending trips to Milledgeville. I also saw the many letters of unsubscribers from Murphy's article on abortion. I thought of the complexity of your witness and how your theology has been formed in the trenches of tears and suffering and hot bodies and angry voices and too sweet coffee and day-old pastries. I'm grateful for it all, for the courage and vision that being close to you all built into my own DNA and that of Lydia's House. Our prayers are with you all and Murphy especially. Pray for me too and us in Cincinnati and the children I'm trying to raise to be good and holy and complicated.

Love,

Mary Ellen Mitchell
Cincinnati, Ohio

Hello!

Here's some stuff that I hope is of use to you. The food bars and coffee were purchased on Feb 17. God bless you! God bless The Open Door Community!

I plan to pray the (weekly) rosary tomorrow. I will think of you then, and in the future, too.

Vote "Democrat" 2020!

Bill Retoff

Minonk, Illinois

Dear David, Ed & Murphy,

I read and study *Hospitality* with a prayer that I might be continually transformed by the Black Jesus. You have given me such a gift and challenge. May you experience the strength, joy, healing, love — all that you need from the Greatest Love.

Deep gratitude & Blessings,

Sandra John

Chico, California

Blessings Open Door Community! Thanks for sending to me the 2020 calendar. May you all find peace in this season and every day that we serve a Risen Savior — Jesus!

Prayers for Murphy Davis and her health, and may the Lord continue to provide Murphy with the strength and grace supplied by our Lord, to overcome any issue with health.

Some of the articles in *Hospitality* are thought provoking and as you know the life of a child in-vitro is precious and created in the image-likeness of our Creator, so I believe, and stand firm that Abortion is Wrong!

Do we really need to characterize our Savior as black, white or other colors? He wasn't partial to race. He represents all peoples, colors, creeds and origins — we should focus on His Deity and why he was born of Virgin Mary and died, suffered and was Risen on the 3rd day! Our creator is spirit and we must worship him in spirit! Jesus was God — Incarnate!

Thanks for your devotion to the helpless and homeless and may you all be filled with Blessings.

Shalom,

Kitrich A. Powell

Ely, Nevada

Dear friends at the Open Door Community,

Thank you for all you do and all you are to bring justice to all.

Enclosed is a small donation to help you as 2020 unfolds. With it I send a promise of prayer for your well-being, and success to your endeavors.

Peace,

Sister Loretta McCarthy

Upper Lake, California



Anna Hogan

Murphy & Ed,

Your monthly paper just keeps getting better and more inspiring. We (I) need it more and more in these times. Am reading *The Warmth of Other Suns* and remembering my childhood in rural central Georgia (1946-47). My playmate was a Black boy named Henry. The son of my mother's maid. They lived on the next hill and I would shout for him to come play. He had a little sister the same age as mine — less than 1 year. She was the second baby I kissed — my sister the first.

The Black children's "school bus" went by our country home, an old farm house. Their school bus was a pickup truck with what looked like a dog house over the bed of the truck. One day I was sent to the country store on an errand and the bus was going my way, empty of children. I jumped on the back bumper as it slowed down to go up Henry's hill. By the time the truck got to the store, it was moving pretty fast. I jumped off and went skidding and tumbling on the clay road. The store owner poured turpentine on my bloody knees. When it was time for me to go to the first grade, we moved into Macon. I gave Henry my scooter. Amy is in Tucson, Arizona showing care and concern to migrants. She comes back today. We love you both.

Amy & Gil Nicolson

Hayesville, North Carolina

Hi Ed,

Thanks for the message and nice to hear from you! It's been a wild ride since I left the Open Door for New York City 27 years ago. In brief, after I left, I did another missionary assignment in NYC working with homeless people. I then earned an M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary. Midway through, I started dating someone of the same sex and we are still together today, now married. My last semester of seminary, the Presbyterian Church changed some rules around and as a result I was ineligible for ordination given my relationship to Mark. I was bitter about that and left the church and have not gone back since.

I did social work with elderly homeless people for a couple of years. We then moved to Chicago for my partner and I was unemployed. I could not find a job in social work, I was a temporary worker at Ernst & Young at the Sear's Tower and fell into facilities management. I have worked in facilities management ever since. We later moved to Washington, D.C. and eventually landed in San Francisco. During the housing bust, we bought a home in Oakland and commute into SF for work.

I have had some really fun jobs in San Francisco. I worked for the San Francisco Ballet, UCSF and others. Perhaps the most bitter and rewarding job was with an entertainment company. I wound up having my facilities role expanded to include executive producing special events ranging in size from 1,500 people up to 7,000. Was in the papers and TV a good bit, even though I have no love for the limelight.

For the past eight years though, I have worked as a facilities director for two private, international, PreK-12 schools. Manage a team of 40 people. I travel internationally a good bit and have fallen in love with Southeast Asia. I plan to retire early to that part of the world and continue to work on a volunteer basis. Perhaps helping clear landmines in Cambodia, habitat preservation for elephants, something like that.

I have attached a picture of my partner and me. He too was a missionary, but in the Jesuit tradition. We both still pray every night and are charitable. I am starting to look into micro-lending as a means of giving. You loan someone money and they pay you back interest-free. Then you turn around and loan that same amount of money out again. I like this because it is kind of like the gift that keeps on giving. The loan amount just circulates from one person in need to the next.

Well, that's enough about me. Sounds like I missed something pretty big; I was really surprised to see y'all moved to Baltimore. I have in-laws in Maryland. Perhaps on a visit to them I can drive up and say hello sometime. The Open Door experience was pivotal in my life. I owe the community a debt of gratitude for teaching me where to find Jesus.

Sincerely,

Andrew Harvill

Oakland City, California

Dear Murphy & Ed,

Thank you so very much for the calendar and your short but full note that I received. You are truly a great witness to the meaning of the gospel of Christ. Your lives explain it all. Your selflessness has inspired me to make a lot of changes.

I am with you all the way when you say that Murphy's heart is filled with Mercy. I am adding Grace & Peace & much more.

I am & will be praying for Murphy. Our God is well able. He is still in the healing ministry.

Blessings galore today and in 2020 and beyond.

Love in Him,

Winona Jones DuCille

Miami, Florida

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed & Murphy,

Nothing makes us happier or weep more than receiving *Hospitality*. The work and education y'all do is inspiring. Thank you for your constant courage and love for all. We wish you a Christmas filled with peace and beauty & a Happy New Year!

Love,

April, Jen, Danny & Leah
"The S'mores"
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Ed,

You, Murphy, Hannah and David are like family to me, you are a blessing. 35 years and I'm still pushing, never give up. I appreciate everything y'all do.

Eli
Prisoner USA

Dear Ed and Murphy,

So grateful to get your community newspaper here at the Guadalupe Catholic Worker. It's way better than the mainstream rag they got here in Santa Barbara County. Really enjoined Ed's poetry and the article by Joyce Hollyday: creative, courageous and clever. More than two and a half decades on the road painting and sharing the "Good News" I started to notice that the only folks who would stop and give a good spirited lift were those who had courage or compassion. Which ultimately gave birth to my creativity. There is a natural confluence between Social Justice, Creativity and Spirituality. The Catholic Worker movement represents that in a good way.

Peace,

Dimitri Kadiev
Guadalupe, California

Dear Friends,

Please use this for your greatest current need in the ministry of ODC Baltimore. I keep you in my prayers, with special prayers for Murphy in these difficult days.

The Lord Be With You. Love and Peace,
Rev. Emily R. Davis (Becky)
Talladega, Alabama

Dear Open Door Community,

Hi my name is Tim Brandt. I am incarcerated. Thank you for your paper, *Hospitality*. It gets read and passed around our section of the prison. Please send a copy of the book *The Cry of the Poor*, so we may also read it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tim Brandt
Livingston, Texas

visitors at the ODC/Baltimore



Photographs by David Payne

In October 2019 Elaine Enns and Ched Myers from Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in Oak View, California came for a visit.

Left: Elaine, Murphy, Eduard and Ched.



Right: Murphy Davis and Michaela Murphy Buc welcomed Lauren Cogswell Ramseur, former ODC Resident Volunteer, in November 2019. She has established a new ministry in Henrico County, Virginia for juveniles. Lauren is married to anti-death penalty lawyer Doug Ramseur. They are the parents of *Hospitality* readers Sarah and Davis, pictured on page 3.



Left: Murphy and Eduard's grandson John Thomas Loring was welcomed by his cousin Michaela for his visit in January 2020.

Open Door Community Needs:

- ☐ Granola bars
- ☐ 2% milk. We use 2 - 3 gallons a week for coffee and we need small containers for children.
- ☐ Coffee. Coffee.
- ☐ Stamps to write prisoners
- ☐ Money for prisoner support and prisoner family support
- ☐ Summer socks
- ☐ Stocking caps
- ☐ Tee shirts Sm/med/large/X large/XX large
- ☐ Blue jeans, all sizes

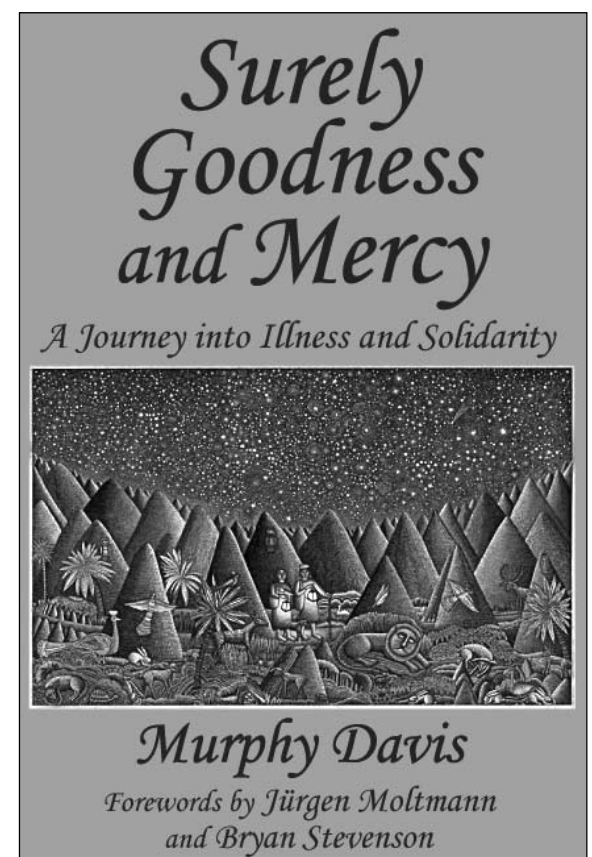
Please send us your name when you give a gift.

Thank you! Murphy, Erica, Beth, Tyrone, Simon, David and Ed



Rita Corbin

coming soon from the Open Door Community Press



Surely Goodness and Mercy

A Journey into Illness and Solidarity

by Murphy Davis

Book Signing | Saturday, June 6 | 3-5 p.m.

Murphy's Comments | 3:30 p.m.

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