

MLK Sermon at FAME

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Pastor Anderson and I are blessed to have been raised in our beautiful, beloved Bay Area, where earth and sky meet water, and little cable cars climb halfway to the stars. But perhaps the most iconic symbol of The Bay, linking land masses and communities, is the Golden Gate Bridge. With its massive red towers, large and looping cables, and occasionally swaying span, it has come to define the geography of the region.

But the Golden Gate Bridge is far more than a connector between San Francisco and its Marin County neighbor to the North. It is a welcoming gateway to America, as travelers from the Far East journeying across a seemingly endless expanse of ocean glimpse its unmistakable silhouette, knowing they've found a haven in a land of promise and opportunity.

As I considered what I wanted to share with you on this day marking Dr. King's legacy, and at this time in our nation's history when there seem to be so many challenges testing our faith and fortitude, I'm thinking a lot about the power and purpose of bridges. For building communities and binding nations in these times demands far more will and conviction than what it takes to raise up even the most impressive span.

The Golden Gate Bridge required seas of concrete and miles of steel, inspiring the intelligence of the most talented engineers, the skill of the most experienced artisans, and the boundless energy—and even the very lives—of those who toiled to bring it to completion. It is a feat and a marvel of the physical world. And yet, it pales in

comparison to the vaunted challenge of bridging the growing divide between peoples in matters of the soul and circumstance.

Why is this so? Why has human progress brought about victories and miracles, but we still can't figure out how to live together in peace? We conquer new diseases every day—discover and generate new energy sources—and create new ways to communicate and connect that tell us way more than we want or need to know about one another.

In so many ways, we stand triumphant over the natural world, even with our tendency to consume and exploit too much of our resources. Indeed, a little humility would go a long way in our rush to create and do more.

And yet, we cannot seem to simply get along—to rise above tribalism—to expand beyond our focus on ourselves—to tame toxic nationalism—and to reign in the plague of pride that has left us, in so many ways, less further along the evolutionary road than when our primal ancestors strolled the Savannah looking for a bite to eat without becoming a bigger bite to eat for a saber-toothed tiger.

Rivers of ink and forests of paper have been dedicated to diagnosing the soul sickness of our age. We find remedies in faith and reason, in the great philosophies of the ages and the most stirring expressions of sacred scripture. But history has shown us time and again, that when economic downturns pressure us from within, and foreign forces threaten us from without, we turn on ourselves, venting our fears and frustrations on the first people to be isolated, attacked, and eliminated: The different, the unique, The Other.

My brothers and sisters of FAME Church, we, Jews and Blacks, know what it is to have been history's eternal Other. We are the scapegoat for the failures of the powerful. We are the villain that unites the supposed "good" and "real" citizens against a common foe. We are the cause and effect for all that is wrong in the world to explain and excuse the inadequacies and insecurities of the wider culture. They make *us* into demons so that they can live with *their* demons.

Antisemitism and racism are mutating viruses, eternal hatreds that shapeshift to meet the vicious needs of the moment. When the proud and the powerful need an easy target, they turn poor communities of color—the least, the lost, and the left behind—into inner city criminals, requiring more police and more prisons—driving the soulless stump speech of the candidate without a conscience.

When the proud and the powerful look for a bogeyman to blame for the global unrest and economic turbulence they themselves have wrought, they conjure the crazy conspiracy of the International Jew—a supernatural evil capable of swaying innocent hearts and minds—a fiendish fever-dream of world domination that would require far more in numbers and organization than the .02% of the world's population of Jews that often can't agree on almost anything.

And perhaps most insidiously, when the proud and the powerful seek to divert and distract the anger and frustration of the white underclass away from their lust for power, their pursuit of greed, and their exploitation of many for the benefit of the few—they blend bigotries into a toxic brew of Jews replacing whites with the wrong kind of migrants who are the wrong kind of color.

Our peoples have walked together on the road to freedom from the start, striving to redeem the promissory note of this nation's founding: From the triumphs of the abolitionist movement to the creation of the NAACP; from battles in this very neighborhood against redlining and real estate covenants to the sit-ins of the civil rights movement. We found common cause in our common suffering, and common purpose in the calls to conscience of the Biblical Exodus story.

And so, it is even more tragic and troubling when some of us turn on each other, undermining the status and successes we've achieved, betraying the bonds of brotherhood and blessing we've forged together in the fiery furnace of persecution. Jewish racism and Black antisemitism are real...and rare...far less frequent and widespread than some would have you believe. They are the offensive offspring of fear, ignorance, and cynicism, and we must always ask ourselves: Who benefits when we are divided...and who is threatened when we join our efforts into a loving and lasting force for repair, change, and justice?

The famous rabbinic sage Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav taught: *Kol Ha-olam kulo, gesher tzar me'od. V'ha-ikar lo l'fached klal*. The world is a narrow bridge—the key is not to be afraid. Reb Nachman understood that to cross from where we are to where we can and should go demands a stoutness of spirit, a honing of heart, and a willingness to face risk and the chance that we may fall and fail. The key is to face those fears with faith, with hope, and with purpose.

For there will always be those who look to raise walls between us rather than build bridges to bind us. But we cannot let the walls of selfishness stand against the bridges of empathy—we cannot let the walls of pride stand against the bridges of

conscience—we cannot let the walls of greed stand against the bridges of justice—and we cannot let the walls of hate stand against the bridges of love.

One of my favorite facts about the Golden Gate Bridge is that they never finish fixing it. Crews move from one end down the 1.7 miles to the other, constantly refining and repairing, painting and primping, shoring up and securing. And when they're done, they start again, committed to an endless project, reflecting an ongoing conviction—a pursuit of a kind of completion which will never be fully finished. But the goal is not merely to achieve a final product—it is a dedication to a timeless and holy process.

May we continue to repair and renew the bridges that link FAME and Temple, and Blacks and Jews more broadly. May we rise above the wedges of conflict wielded by those who thrive when we are divided in a world still awaiting justice and redemption. And may we see in one another's eyes, hear in one another's words, and feel in one another's hearts the true content of our character as we commit ourselves again and again to bringing about the beloved community of Dr. King's dream. *Ken y'hi ratzon*—may this be God's will. Amen.