

Remarks of the Rev. Dave Hunter
Voices of Unity
Gettysburg, PA, October 5, 2013

The summer of 1965: A group of law students was sent to the South to collect data on the use of capital punishment in rape cases. I was part of that group. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund was trying to prove, in court, that capital punishment for rape was racially discriminatory. It was, I can assure you. Eventually, the Supreme Court banned use of capital punishment for rape altogether. That was progress.

A friend of mine, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech, published an essay celebrating the progress that African Americans have made in the last half century, citing statistics relating to education, employment, housing, and so on. In his speech at the Lincoln Memorial, King said that he had been to the Mountain Top, he had seen the Promised Land – in the distance, in the future.

Here's my questions: If Martin Luther King were with us today, would he say that we have reached the Promised Land? Would he say that the Kingdom of God, or the realm of peace, justice, and sustainability had arrived?

I don't think so. We have a shut-down federal government. We have Detroit – my beloved Detroit – in bankruptcy. We have Philadelphia unable to educate its children. We have a Supreme Court that has dismantled the Voting Rights Act – the Voting Rights Act that I spend most of my legal career enforcing – with Texas and North Carolina responding with measures of voter repression. And we have the sad story of Henry Wallace – see today's New York Times.

Can we, some day, reach the Promised Land, the Promised Land of justice and equality, of King's dream?

Yes, we can. King used to say – echoing the words of the 19th century Unitarian minister and abolitionist, Theodore Parker – King used to say, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” How did they, King and Parker, think that this justice would come about?

Did they rely on some theory of gravity? I don't think so.

Did they expect divine intervention, a decree from Heaven? I don't think so.

No. What King, and Parker before him, understood was that it is up to us, us humans, to do the hard work to get us from here to there.

And what would *there* look like? The Promised Land must include racial justice in the United States.

But it is more than that. The Promised Land must enable all of us in the United States to receive justice and to thrive.

But it is more than that. The United States is not an island, isolated from the rest of the world. The Promised Land must include everyone on this planet.

Not only that, the Promised Land must include future generations as well.

And how do we get there? How do we build and sustain a world of peace and justice? We must vote, march, organize, use our economic power.

Can we summarize all this in one word? If we could, that word would be *love*.

We must unleash the power of love.

We must set the example of a life of love.

We must stand on the side of love.

Thank you, and amen.