

# Walking the Talk

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*"Where do we go from here:  
Chaos or Community?"*  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights  
Advocate (1929 - 1968)

## *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

This is the question that mature people pose to themselves - and to their communities - as they explore the way toward their best possibilities. I feel a deep personal obligation to stand on behalf of Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideals and convictions that express *"unless the whole of American society takes a new turn toward economic justice, there would be limitations placed on genuine progression"*. Dr. King left documents and published papers that exude memories of chaotic experiences during his life but he consistently took the high road and worked toward building a better community for all people. Dr. King predicted that there would be challenges and demands for better jobs, equal pay, decent housing, access to quality education and opportunities to serve in political government. Nevertheless, I believe optimism regarding change is for the betterment of our great country. Change is constant and President John F. Kennedy stated *"change is the law of life, and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future"*.

Dr. King led the economic justice movement when he responded to the call of sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968 where he was assassinated. I was born and raised in Memphis, and in 1968, I was only 10 years old but this horrific situation still remains in my memory. I recall schools shutting down, protest marches, looting, rioting and National Guard troops. His death exemplified the chaos he felt during his time of this earth. Remembering history is a constant reminder why we should embrace the positive aspects of fellowship and community.

Fellowship and community mean recognizing that the problems of bias, economic exploitation, and war are all tied together. Today, millions of people face poverty. Questions need to be asked about the economic system and about a broader distribution of wealth.

Questions deserve answers and to move from chaos to community we must come together. We must choose diversity over division; declare inclusion instead of isolation, and choose equality over evil. *"Nation-building is never a done deal confined to history already established"* (Aberjahani). A fair and impartial playing field is the navigation system that guides specific principles for every race, creed and nationality. Mae West said, *"we only live once, but if we live right the first time, once is enough"*. If you want to know where we go from here, you must pack a suitcase with an open mind, loving heart and a sincere spirit to embark upon prayer, quality education, hard work, and respect for one another. Dr. King was laced with grace and it is our responsibility to rise above negativity and emphasize positivity in the midst of adversity. All our struggles should be met with the high plane of dignity as we continue to build consensus for determining where we go from here.

Theodore Roosevelt indicated *"in any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing; the next best thing is the worst thing; and the worst thing you can do is nothing"*. We must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back and abandon the principles of community and revert back to chaos. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. Although a setback is a set up for a come back, there will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our delicate hopes blasted. Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with a bold faith in the future. In the words of Dr. King - *"We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is today."*

I encourage you to make sure that you fulfill your civic duty of moving us from chaos to community in Douglas County. As we continue to strive for excellence, we need a hand up, not hand-outs. We must become trendsetters instead of trouble makers. We must lift each other up, not push each other down. In this challenge of life and history, there is a thing as being too late. *"Procrastination is still the thief of time"* (Edward Young). We must stop talking about it and be about it. Without the power of positive thinking, life often leaves us bare, unclothed, and disconsolate with lost opportunity.

The term good is not good enough. We must move from good to great. Vince Lombardi said *"there is no room for second place."* We must render ourselves as examples of class, dignity and humility. We must become the catalyst of people who believe that we can achieve our goals. When we start doing the right thing, we no longer have the right to remain silent. Moving from chaos to community will position the millennials and other generations to tap into un-chartered territories of science, technology, engineering and math.

Today we have sufficient resources in the great bank of opportunity and we hold a certified check that will yield us on demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. The words of poet James Weldon Johnson give a glimpse of hope.

*Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod.  
Felt in the days  
When hope unborn had died.  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place  
For which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way  
That with tears has been watered.  
We have come treading our paths  
Through the blood of the slaughtered.  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the bright gleam  
Of our bright star is cast.*

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry. It will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired hands and feet a renewed strength as we continue our forward stride toward greatness. Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: *"Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7). This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I do believe we as a people will overcome."

Walking the Talk with you,

*Romona*

*(This column contains excerpts from the keynote address given by Dr. Romona Jackson Jones at the MLK Day Observance January 16, 2017, at New Mountain Top Baptist Church in Winston.)*

