



Moment for Mission

As we look to the national holiday that honors the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this **Moment for Mission** is a poignant reminder of the call that urges us on - *to inspire and equip our students for meaningful lives of leadership and service.*

On Thursday, January 12, Dr. Booker and our very own students in *The Corporation* were the featured guests at the City of Spartanburg's annual Unity Breakfast. The remarks Dr. Booker shared are an encouragement to us all. Our talented students in *The Corporation* received a standing ovation for their performance of "Go Light Your World." We invite you to read Dr. Booker's profound reflections and enjoy this gift of song from our students.



<https://youtu.be/Sdo41oDKozI>

A big thanks to *The Corporation* for reprising their performance so we could share it with you!

A Ritual To Read to Each Other

William E. Stafford

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider—
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give—yes, no, or maybe—
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep

American poet William E. Stafford wrote this poem. As we enter this new year, I thought it very fitting to share. It speaks to me about the gift of relationship and the responsibility (and privilege) we have to get to know each other, to listen so we can better understand one another, to offer kindness so caring grows, to pay attention so you can recognize someone else's pain, to risk being authentic and even vulnerable with one another so we can grow trust, to trust each other's truth so we can honor important differences, and to honor differences so we can exercise being real and human in order to discover what we have in common.

We live in a society today where it is becoming customary to define the devastation of hate and violence, the depth of inequity and intolerance with numbing one words like: Charleston, Orlando, Townville, Ferguson, Syria, Politics, Terror, and on it goes on and on. Our children today have to grapple with social issues the likes of which our parents, our grandparents, and we never imagined. As William Stafford concluded, "The darkness around us is deep."

So, the question I want to pose for us is this, "How do we begin to diminish this darkness?" Well, Dr. King spoke to this same darkness, and he shared these lasting words with us. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

We will honor in the coming days a man who left us with a profoundly rich legacy that is ours to steward. Dr. King demonstrated to us that we – you and I – we have the power to make what he called our *beloved community*, a better place.

I am humbled beyond measure to bring greetings on this day when we as a community come together to talk about unity. When we come together to honor a leader whose noble vision and voice inspired real and genuine progress for people of all races, and whose life provided us with an abiding example of what it means to advocate for right over wrong, to promote peace and justice, to honor humanity, to live with hope and love - - to be a light when darkness is ever present.

My upbringing and my faith taught me from an early age that there is a light inside of all of us. In fact, one of the first songs I ever learned was "This Little Light of Mine". Be it fueled by your faith, your family, your values, your hopes or dreams – what matters is that you carry that light into our community. When people ask me where I live, I am so proud to tell them I live in a place called Spartanburg, South Carolina. I was born and raised here, and I hope to die and be buried here. I hope my children choose to make this their home.

As I look out in this audience, I am reminded of what a truly remarkable community this is – but, we must be wise enough to ask ourselves how can we be better and how do we go about our work...

- To *Live United* and move 2,000 families on to the path to self-sufficiency in 2,000 days.
- To *Strive Together* and create a county-wide culture that truly values education.
- To *Be Bold, Be Brave, Be Well* and accelerate community health and inspire everyone in our community to create changes that lead to better health.
- To ensure safe, strong and thriving communities for generations to come.
- To strengthen our villages by uniting a committed leadership base focused on educating, engaging, and inspiring the family.
- To *See Spartanburg in a New Light*.
- To become *One Spartanburg*.

It begins with a belief that this community, our beloved community, can *Be Seen in A New Light*. A hope and a belief that we can, should and will live up to the fact that in a country made up of thousands and thousands of communities there is only *One Spartanburg*. But we must also recognize that values and mission statements and tag lines can only go so far in bringing about real change. To move our community forward, we must do the work. Work requires responsibility and it requires accountability. It requires action and while people outside of Spartanburg wouldn't guess this is "where the action is" – I believe it can be.

It also requires as William Stafford said for "awake people to be awake"... and I call on all of us to wake up and remain awake. The darkness around us is deep. We often talk about collective impact in our community. What role are you playing in being a part of this impact?

Dr. King put it this way, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism (kindness, self-sacrifice, genuineness, sincerity) or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."

What I hope we all understand is that our actions speak louder than our words. The light you bring to bear in this world will define your relationships, your relevance, your reality and ultimately your reward.

We have the power to build each other up. We have the capacity in this community to create a better Spartanburg for every member in this community. We have the resources to revitalize neighborhoods and promote equity. Our philanthropic spirit is a testament to the time, talent and treasure we give of so freely. We can widen the circle and make more room at the table. We can be the community that values every one, regardless of their race, economic status, standing in the community, or their zip code.

But just as easily as we can build each other up, I have witnessed the power we possess to tear each other down. We can mock new models and approaches to change before even giving them a chance to bear fruit. We can ignore the potential and power of collective impact because we wish to go it alone. We are at times fearful that someone else might receive the credit, so instead of celebrating success and encouraging progress, we are quick to cast doubt or disparage someone else's efforts. We often fail to realize that people who shine from within don't need a spotlight.

I call on each of us to be that "light" that Dr. King spoke of. To recognize that darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can. Edith Wharton said this, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." Every one of us plays a role in making this community a better place. Some choose to stand on the sidelines, and while that is not okay, it is what it is. Remember I am appealing to a voice... to something shadowy... to that remote important region inside of you. In other words, to those of us who wake up each morning and make the choice to be a voice. I beseech you to be that light or to be that mirror that reflects it.

Light rekindles light. But understand, as difficult as it is to ignite a fire's flame, it is more difficult to keep a fire going. We are all called to be the keepers of the flame. Don't be the one who spends their moments seeking to extinguish the flame. Remember, "Blowing out someone else's candle won't make yours shine brighter."-Anon

Soon after Kathy Hill reached out to me about serving as the speaker for this morning's Unity Breakfast, I received an email from Lisa Cunningham, Spartanburg High School's Choral Director. She informed me that *The Corporation* had been invited to perform and asked if it

might be helpful to share with me the song they were considering singing as I drafted my comments. At that point I had no idea what I needed to share with you this morning. But I do believe God speaks to us in myriad ways, if we are quiet enough to listen. I went online and listened to the song. Truth be known, I have listened to it just about everyday. As I wrap up this morning, I want to thank Lisa and these wonderful students who I simply adore for helping me to direct my comments.

I know this isn't a rah-rah type message, and I'm sorry there's not much humor in it. There is a time and a season for everything. In the simplest terms, to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the purpose of his life, all I am asking is two things: 1) to recognize that there is a light in each of us, and 2) "Go Light Your World"

The song I am speaking to is called "Go Light Your World" by Chris Rice.

*There is a candle in every soul
Some brightly burning, some dark and cold
There is a spirit who brings a fire
Ignites a candle and makes his home...*

As the song goes on ...the lyrics remind us that maybe the root of all cruelty is to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

So, we are called to **run** to the darkness, **seek** out the helpless, confused, and torn, the lonely, the tired, the worn, the deceived and the poor. **Take your candle...Go light the world.** I realize at times it is difficult. Sometimes human nature gets in the way, but remember what Stafford said, "if we don't avoid our current patterns they will prevail" or, God forbid, we will return to those "horrible errors of our childhood."

If you don't know the kind of person I am, and I don't know the kind of person you are we may miss our star. Dr. King said it this way, "People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other."

Relationships build connections. Connections build community.

What a gift we have in each other.

Let's carry our candles and let's go light our world.