

The Baobab Tree - "The Tree of Life"

BEAUTIFUL ARE THEIR FEET
HONOREE
Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery



The Lord, your God, will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. Deuteronomy 18:15 (NRSV)

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n March 29, 1960, an ad appeared in The New York Times asking the public to support the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. The ad was entitled "Heed Their Rising Voices," and the verbiage said, "The growing mass of peaceful mass demonstrations by Negroes is something new in the South, something understandable...Let Congress heed their rising voices, for they will be heard." That ad was signed by a host of Americans (Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee, Sammy Davis Jr., Harry Emerson Fosdick, A. Philip Randolph, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth ... and one Rev. Joseph Lowery. The ad was asking for money to help Dr. King against a perjury indictment in Alabama.

The ad incensed the white leadership of Alabama, and the state filed a lawsuit against the New York Times and four ministers mentioned: Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. S.S. Seay, Jr., Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and ... Rev. Joseph Lowery. The suit was ruled in favor of The Times, but the ministers named didn't fare so well. The Alabama court ruled to seize their property. Rev. Lowery, who had been a pillar and a tower in the Civil Rights Movement could only think of the property his father had given him and his siblings in Huntsville, Alabama. Had he said they had that property, the court would have seized it. The court had already seized property from Ralph Abernathy.

He said his lawyers agreed not to mention the property in Huntsville, and Lowery figured he had handled the potential problem, but when he got on the stand, he was met with a question that threw him. "Where were you born?" he asked, and he says, "I froze. I suppose I should have said 'Huntsville,'

but ...the Lord spoke to me and I said 'Madison.'" It was true; Huntsville was in the county of Madison. The lawyers didn't ask him any more questions about where he lived. He held onto his land, though the court took his car. Members of his church later bought the car back at an auction and sold it to Lowery's wife for \$1. "I was the only one of the preachers who didn't get a new car" he said.

Lowery was a part of the leadership of the movement which gave it its spiritual girding. The leaders were almost all ministers; Lowery, along with Dr. King, Rev. Ralph Abernathy and a few others, formed the Southern Christian Leadership Committee (SCLC) and they launched a movement in the Deep South.

Dr. Lowery was completely committed to the practice of non-violence. He said it had a spiritual component and a practical component. There was no way, he and the others knew, that black people would be able to go up against white people with their well-funded and heavily weaponed police departments. The law was not on their side. That's when he realized there was a spiritual dimension to non-violence. The only way to beat the giant called racism was to be non-violent and he and the others knew it. Lowery and the others grabbed hold to the Gospel and the words of Jesus; since Jesus had said to love your enemies, to forgive everyone and to bless those who persecuted them, they felt they had no choice but to live those commands.

That spirit of non-violence probably saved their lives and accounted for the success of the movement and the goals for human and civil rights they were after. It gave Lowery to meet face to face with then-Governor George Wallace of Alabama with a list of demands those wanting the right to vote had decided upon. Though he knew the virulence and enmity of Wallace and all who resided in the Alabama State House, the principle of non-violence gave him the courage to face Wallace and to not hate him. To those who did not understand, what Lowery and the others did was foolhardy; they fought evil without being armed with anything other than the promise and presence of God.

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Dr. Lowery has remained on the side of social justice for all marginalized groups; he has supported the demand for civil and human rights of the LGBT community and has supported same-sex unions. He led the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965; he was a co-founder and former president of the Black Leadership Forum; he has received numerous honorary degrees from institutions including Dillard University, Morehouse College, Alabama State University and Emory University. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama in 2009 and Ebony Magazine has recognized him as one of America's 15 greatest preachers.

When President Obama was inaugurated in 2009, Dr. Lowery was asked to give the benediction. Some of his friends objected; they thought he should give the invocation, but Dr. Lowery said no; he was all right with giving the benediction. "Mine will be the last voice the people hear." Dr. Lowery came to the podium that cold day and prayed for the country and for the new president: "God of our weary years; God of our silent tears; thou who has brought us thus far on the way..." He continued to repeat words of: Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing, and said, "We truly give thanks for the....we ask your presence on Barack Obama his family and his administration. He has come to this high office in a low moment, but because we know you've got the whole world in your hands ... we know that Lord, you're able and you're willing to work through faithful leadership ... heal our wounds and (to) deliver us from the exploitation of the poor and the least of these... We thank you that you have inspired our leader to make us believe that 'yes, we can.' We come in the spirit of unity and solidarity... Help us to make

choices on the side of love, not hate, on the side of inclusion, not exclusion, tolerance and not intolerance and as we leave this mountain ... we go now to walk together, children. We will not get weary in the days ahead ... help us to get to the day when none will be afraid ... in the joy of a new beginning, we ask for a day when black will not be asked to get back, when brown can stick around, when yellow will be mellow, when the red man can get ahead man, and when white will embrace what is right."

### **BIOGRAPHY HIGHLIGHTS**

"to work for that day ... when justice will roll down like water and righteousness as a mighty stream"

Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery Nickname: Dean of the Civil Rights Movement

#### **BORN**

October 6, 1921, Huntsville, AL

### **E**DUCATION

BA, Paine College, Augusta, GA Ddiv, Chicago Ecumenical Institute

#### MINISTRY FOOTSTEPS

Joseph Lowery Institute for Justice and Human Rights Civil Rights Activist Former SCLC Chairman

## HIS LEGACY

## Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery









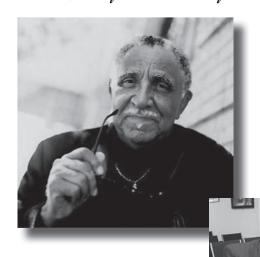






## LOVE AND HONOR

Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery









## Crusader for Justice

# Rev. Dr. Joseph Lowery

















