In Honor of Black History Month

Howard Washington Thurman

1899 – 1981

Keep alive the dream; for as long as a man has a dream in his heart, he cannot lose the significance of living. – **Howard Thurman, Meditations of the Heart**

Howard Thurman was an influential preacher, theologian, author, educator and philosopher. As an ordained Baptist minister, he was the first dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and was also on the faculty of the School of Divinity there. He was the first African American dean of Marsh Chapel at the traditionally all-white Boston University and was also on the faculty there. It was here that he inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. and other students committed to social justice. Thurman was the founder of the first interracial interfaith congregation in the U.S., Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco.

Thurman was the grandson of former slaves, raised by his grandmother. Through his travels and meetings with leaders including Mahatma Gandhi he was influenced to promote nonviolence and the development of inward personal relationship with God. He was a prolific writer and a popular speaker. His best known book, Jesus and the Disinherited, interprets Jesus' teachings through the experience of the oppressed and the need for nonviolent response to such oppression. He asserted that faith-based unconditional love would enable people to endure oppression.

- You can read more at the Boston University Howard Thurman Papers Project.
- For an 8 minute film, "Backs Against the Wall: The Howard Thurman Story"
- There is also a feature length documentary, "The Psalm of Howard Thurman"

Howard Thurman quotes:

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish thinker and teacher appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.

– **Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited**

In the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair. Listen to the long stillness: New life is stirring New dreams are on the wing New hopes are being readied: Humankind is fashioning a new heart Humankind is forging a new mind God is at work. This is the season of Promise. Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

– **Howard Thurman, The Living Wisdom of Howard Thurman: A Visionary for Our Time**

Submitted by Leoma Sparer, Adult Education Team (SALT)