



DAY FOUR

Nancy Diamond and Jeffrey Mayer

We began our journey together with Rev. Warnock telling a parable from the Gospel of Luke that could have been about any of us: About the wealthy man whose biggest challenge was where to store his excess wealth.

The Reverend warned us about confusion: Confusion about who we are, where we are going, and where we are from. How like the Al-Chet prayer on Yom Kippur where we ask forgiveness for confusion of mind.

We realized that like the man in the parable we were confused. Confused after walking beneath the steel slabs commemorating thousands of

lynching victims around the country, hanging like strange fruit from tree limbs.

Confused after following Rosa Parks' two block bus ride and reliving her arrest for the simple act of standing her ground against humiliation. Confused after hearing Ms. Lowery recall the beating and kicking she endured at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Confused after standing in the Birmingham Park where children were attacked by police dogs and knocked down by pressure hoses.

We thought that, as Jews, our history of oppression equipped us with a special empathy for our Black brothers and sisters. We imagined a special kinship as we watch the growing threat of white nationalism and found comfort in our empathy. But we realized we have not walked in our brothers' and sisters' shoes. We have failed to see ourselves as others see us. We were confused.

The 89-year old Bishop Woods appeared diminutive this morning, dressed in a double-breasted polyester suit with a silk pocket handkerchief and paisley tie. Then he began speaking and we were stunned by his exuberant baritone, punctuated occasionally by a whoop and holler worthy of an Alabama football crowd.

As Bishop Woods began to relate his stories of the movement in Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s, the pain of his past was palpable. While he broke into protest songs with a booming voice, and at times leaped into the air with the energy of a 50-year-old,

he still seemed to be traveling the road toward healing from the traumas he has experienced most of his life. Through his oneness with God, preaching from whatever pulpit he can, he perseveres. "I'm here for a reason," he said. "God has spared me to be here to tell you about God's movement."

Bishop seemed truly moved to have had the support of a few white folks during the movement. "We believed in love and non-violence and because of that we got more white people," he said. "God made us a beautiful bouquet of flowers." He told Jeff afterwards that he reminded him of the white man at the L.L. Newberry lunch counter who stepped forward and tried to protect him and four other young men who were about to be attacked by white boys and the police for their non-violent sit-in. It was a powerful and moving exchange.



Here was somebody who witnessed horrific events and could speak to them live. As with Holocaust survivors, it won't be long before we are unable to meet a civil rights survivor. To quote our friends in the south, we are "truly blessed" to have had this opportunity. None of us will forget the Bishop.

Our guide, Billy, reminded us this morning of MLK's comments, written from his Birmingham jail cell in April 1963 and exhibited at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: "I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace which is the presence of justice."

Those words are challenging. Like this three-day trip through the Deep South, they make us uncomfortable. How often have we practiced patience over persistence, caution over courage, silence over protest?



While this trip has certainly not yet dispelled our confusion, it has helped us to begin our process. It has been gratifying – enjoyable would not be the appropriate term -- to experience this provocative trip with new and old friends from Connecticut.

We expect this will be the beginning, and not an end, to our exploration of our shared history, to a search for meaningful ways to dispel the confusion of the man in Warnock's parable, to finding practical ways to ease the modern-day legacy of slavery and the courage and energy to do so.

*Nancy Diamond and
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