



Greetings!

*“And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” - Romans 10:15 KJV*

I was inspired by the diverse poetry dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as published on the website [read poetry](#). As you know February is Black History month. I have always liked poetry, which is probably one of the reasons I like to sing so much?

The writer of Romans wrote this fragment that makes up one of the great arias in Handel’s Messiah. I remember the first time I heard this piece. I was in high school in LaGrange near Louisville, KY. Overwhelmed by text and music, this piece spoke to me in a deep, soul way. As a teenager I was beginning to take discipleship seriously. I was moving from belief to faith in action. Later in life, I was remembering the deep touch of this piece. The first time I thought of it I was in seminary at Candler. I had the fortune to meet most of the remaining living members of the leadership of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. These are all people I had seen in the context of photography, print media, history books and on television. Emory did an amazing job introducing their students to a wide variety of leadership. As many of these persons lived in the Atlanta metro area, connections were made. These leaders, many of them pastors, were guest preachers or class lecturers.

While all of these leaders were famous, they had an amazing ability to put you at ease. Each in their own way had something deeper than fame or recognition. Each exemplified the notion of presence. As a Christian, I experienced that notion as the presence of the Holy Spirit. In reflecting on these meetings at Candler School of Theology chapel services or in small seminar classrooms, I kept hearing the music of this aria, “How Beautiful Are the Feet”. Each of these local church pastors started out in a small town, county seat or city church. They didn’t start out famous. They began their walk by hearing the call of God and listening to peoples' needs. Doing so led to a legacy that all of us have had the opportunity to experience and to learn many important things about ourselves and others.

Years later, when I led a confirmation trip to the King Center in Atlanta, I shared this story with our kids from our church (Dr. Suzanne Allen was our associate pastor and youth leader). They had no idea that the church played such a huge role in the call to freedom, so much so, that it captivated the nation and led to a number of landmark pieces of legislation that provided more equity and justice in our country.

Now Handel may not seem like the right genre of music when talking about the impact of black clergy from the Civil Rights era, but I disagree.

***When the marches for freedom began, the leaders were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."  
When the dogs and the water cannon were deployed, the leaders were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."***

***When the freedom riders rode, the leaders were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."***

***When people went to vote, the leaders were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."***

***When the churches were bombed, and the children were killed, the leaders were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."***

***When one by one, these leaders were called home there is no doubt in my mind that they were "Preaching the Gospel of Peace."***

I hope you will take the time to read the poems on [read poetry](#). They were designed to be read on January 20, MLK's birthday. As you read them, as you contemplate Black History month, I hope the music and the text might surround you.

### **A Prayer for Justice-**

#### **For Courage to do Justice**

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others

Open my ears that I may hear their cries;

Open my heart so that they need not be without succor;

Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,

Nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,

And use me to bring them to those places.

And so open my eyes and my ears

That I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee. Amen.

*(Paton, Alan South Africa, United Methodist Hymnal #456, The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, TN., 1989.)*

Music - [Wendy Waller sings "How Beautiful are the Feet" from Handel's Messiah](#)

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

