**INSPIRATIONAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ALVIN TURNER**

Hello everyone and thank you for giving me a few moments to express my thoughts and feelings at this commemoration service honoring the life and brilliance and everlasting impact of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (**If there is anyone in particular you would like to acknowledge, do that here**). I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and of course, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

it is with very mixed feelings that I speak with all of you today.... on one hand it is almost impossible to grasp that this year marks **FIFTY** years since the assassination of this great man... **FIFTY** years since we lost the light that guided our parents and grandparents and neighbors who witnessed and marched in the streets of Selma.... **FIFTY** years since we lost the courage of the man that inspired the tenacity and spiritual guidance that gave us a voice during the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott. **FIFTY** years since we lost the leadership of a man who believed in making an impact with peaceful protest while telling the world in no uncertain terms, “**WE. HAVE. HAD. ENOUGH**.”

On the other hand, we have been blessed with a legacy that has shaped generations and that continues to inspire and influence our cause and our compassion. Dr. King shone a light on divisiveness and civil **WRONGS**. His wisdom provided the light to guide all of us to a better place and a higher purpose.... the question is... have we, as a civilization... as a society... as a **PEOPLE**, heeded his message? Have we as a country.... a culture... as participants in living our lives and working on changing the course of events and the evolution of human nature.... have we as collective humanity done what has been necessary and needed and mandated to insure our rights and freedoms for the past **FIFTY** years?? Have the causes of **UNITY, COMPASSION, RESPECT,** and **EQUALITY** been advanced and solidified **AT ALL** over the course of the last two generations?.... and what can **WE**, as dignified, self-respecting members and partners in our own communities and in our own country do? Each year we celebrate the life of this great man. Are our speeches and promises fleeting affirmations? Does our enthusiasm expire around the end of February, just as we finish celebrating Black History Month? Are we sincere in our purpose for only six weeks of a full year? Think about it. When will we truly understand that there are no rehearsals for life and we have **ONE CHANCE** to be heard and to claim our rights and freedoms? Are we going to allow Dr. King’s life and mission, and considerable sacrifice be in vain, or as we remember his work, do we find the spark within **US** to carry on with his mission? I for one have spent a lot of time studying the work of this great man. I am here to continue to spread his word and to heed his calling, and it is my intention that today I find partners sitting right here, in front of me, to take up the mantle and to continue advocating for the movement he believed in, that means so much.

One way in which we can preserve and promote this rich and critical legacy is to continue to look towards the examples of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to find answers, wisdom, and renewed dedication to our mutual purpose.

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Dr. King said those words and he also knew that another light must shine... the light of knowledge, the torch of truth, the beacon of understanding. He reminds us, “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”

Dr King is gone but his will and spirit and words live on. His legacy drives us to examine our participation and that of those who share our country , our world, and these trying times. He lived his life as an example to others. He talked the talk and he **DEFINITELY** walked the walk... in marches, on missions, through non violent protest. We know about the legend and his legacy, but who was the **MAN**? What gave him the strength and the drive to find his voice and make sure he was heard? Where did he find the courage to not only speak out against racism, hate and injustice, but to **DO** something to advance understanding and partnership? Remember... “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

There is an expression that teaches us, “I am part of all that I have met.” I know that’s true about me and how I have been inspired and taught by those who have influenced me throughout my life. This was also certainly true of Dr. King. He was raised in Georgia as part of a family dedicated to their faith. His grandfather was a rural minister who took over the Ebenezer Baptist Church. His father stepped in to run the church as his grandfather passed on, and I suppose we might say that Martin Luther King Jr.... who, by the way was born with the name ”Michael,” entered the “family business” when it was his time. Although Martin’s parents tried to protect him and his siblings from the rampant ravages of widespread racism, that was not possible. Martin Luther King Sr. believed racism was “an affront to God’s will” and he preached for the rights of all people.

Martin Luther King Jr exhibited intelligence and curiosity at an early age. He was bright enough to skip both the ninth and eleventh grades in high school, and he was just fifteen years old when he entered Moorhouse College. Apparently, although he was bright, he was not as motivated as he could have been.... **UNTIL** he took a Bible study class and that sparked his inner calling. Along the way, he met mentors and guides and all became a part of the formation of the brilliant, committed, inspirational leader who continues to guide and influence all of us, generations after his tragic passing.

Dr. King had drive and passion and was committed to his mission of fostering peace, equality and respect for his brothers and sisters and for everyone. He studied the work and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and refined his discipline to include the power of non violent protest. He referred to the Indian spiritual leader and activist as “The guiding light of our technique of non-violent social change.” In 1959, Dr. King and his wife, Coretta Scott King spent five weeks touring India and observing the extreme poverty, overpopulation, and unemployment while noting the low crime rate and the strong presence of spirituality. When he returned from his trip, he noted, “Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity.”

What has happened to us? What has happened to our world, to our points of view, to the attitudes in our communities and to the underlying attitudes and conditions that seem to be rearing their ugly heads more and more frequently these days? Will we ever find the answer to the puzzle when we ask, “ How do we form a **UNION**.... one in which all people are equal and everyone has respect for one another? Have we become lazy? Scared? Depressed? Jaded? Are we so desensitized to the problems we face every single day that we seem to have given up the struggle for self-respect, justice, and equality? I certainly hope that’s not the case.

So many significant, impassioned, committed people have sacrificed so much in order for us to maintain our rightful place in our communities, our country and our lives and I refuse to allow the darkness of ignorance and hate to prevail.... so what do we do? Days like today.... commemorations like the ones we celebrate each year around January 15th remind us to go back to the “playbook” of Martin Luther King Jr. He left us with a trove of information and an inspired roadmap, but it is up to each one of us to find the strength and the purpose within to continue to pursue his work and maintain his message. Remember that he said, “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do **you have to keep moving forward.**” It is no longer acceptable to send “the other guy” to fight the battle. Every day, thanks to the power of modern technology and the speed with which news travels, we learn that we are under siege, and whether it is at the national, state, local, or individual level, the struggles are real and the challenge to survive and sustain ourselves has gotten very, **VERY** **personal**. It’s time for each one of us to take a serious and thorough look at what **WE** can do, in the name of Martin Luther King, Jr, to let the world know that we **WILL** find the way, with dignity and purpose.... with intelligence and compassion... with integrity and truth... to tear down the obstacles that have conspired to stop us in the past. Remember.... if you can’t fly, run. If you can’t run, walk..... but we **MUST** keep moving forward. Complacency and inaction are equally as responsible for us to be complicit as is acceptance of poor behavior., disrespect, and inequality.

On some level we also must believe that “ Living well is the best revenge.” By that I don’t mean promoting the need for fancy possessions and throwing around a lot of money... what I **DO** mean is that each one of us, and our children, and our families and our neighbors and our colleagues must take a stand to live a life of integrity, purpose, well being, creativity, and community involvement..... **NO MATTER** what we **DO** or **DON’T** have. There are certain human and humane qualities that can’t be taken from us, and while sometimes it gets almost impossible to maintain optimism, we **MUST** know that within each one of us lies a renewing supply of strength, compassion, and the will to survive. There is no place in this new world for apathy. There is no time to “sit this one out.” All we have is ourselves, our smarts, and our strength and resilience, and as we’ve heard lately, Time’s Up. It’s up for a lot of things and Time’s up for allowing negative energy and influences to poison our families, our neighborhoods and our futures. Just as Dr. King promoted non-violent action, so must we....but the most important thing is to heed the call to **ACTION**.

By the way, no one said this would be easy... in fact in so many ways working towards a seismic shift in attitude and condition is practically impossible, but as Audrey Hepburn once said, the very word “**IMPOSSIBLE**” betrays itself because what it really says is, “**I’M POSSIBLE**.”

So now it’s time to think about how **YOU** will participate in the mission and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. you don’t have to declare yourself publicly ... **YET**, but the time will come when each of us will be called to take a stand. The time is approaching for us to demonstrate a shift in attitude, and the time has come to find our own way of making a difference. We have to do it for ourselves, for our families, for our neighbors, our congregations, and for the memory of those like Dr. King who have sacrificed so much so that we might even be able to have this conversation.

Commitment doesn’t have to start big, but it must be sincere and meaningful and done in the name of all of us. It is no longer acceptable to stand by idly while the dream is threatened to becoming a nightmare. I **WILL NOT** tolerate that and neither should you. We must say no to violence and indifference and we must reject injustice and divisiveness. We can see the cracks in the armor of the establishment. We can see the power of a collective voice and we must join together to increase that voice so that our message is undeniable, clear, and **DEAFENING** in its purpose and intent. We **WILL** find the way to live lives of dignity and equality following the philosophy, guidance and hard work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and we will do it **TOGETHER**. We **MUST**. It’s the only way. In his time, Dr. King fought for voter’s rights and as a response to his mission, we must use that vote... both metaphoric and real... for the good of mankind.

Remember his words....”I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons .... AND DAUGHTERS of former slaves and the sons AND DAUGHTERS of former slave owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood.” Amen and thank you all.