

Successor to Martin Luther King Jr. urges unity in cathedral sermon

The Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock invited those attending an interfaith/ecumenical prayer service April 12 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland to join hands with those near them.

As all in the nearly full cathedral did so, Archbishop William E. Lori joined hands with Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh and Baltimore Police Commissioner Darryl DeSouza while seated in the sanctuary.

Rev. Warnock, senior pastor of Atlanta's historic Ebenezer Baptist Church, invited the congregation to imagine a great multitude of men and women, boys and girls from the four corners of the earth. "They looked into each other's eyes and they were not afraid."

The preacher said he asked one of those in this vision what was happening.

"He said, 'It is the kingdom of God imbued with love and justice,' and so I asked, 'Where is this?'" Rev. Warnock said.

"And he answered, 'It exists already in the hearts of those who have the courage to believe and struggle.' And so I asked, 'When is this?' And he answered, 'When we learned the simple art of loving each other as sisters and brothers.'

"And so, O God, give us wisdom, give us courage for the living of these days, for the facing of this hour as we bear witness to your kingdom," he prayed. "O God, who loves us into freedom and frees us into loving, to you we offer this prayer."

Rev. Warnock, spiritual successor to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. - and his father, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., known as "Daddy King" - was invited by Archbishop Lori to be the guest preacher for a prayer service to commemorate the April 4, 1968, assassination of Rev. King Jr. Rev. Warnock is only the fifth senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, which was founded in 1886. He has been senior pastor since 2005.

He spent five years in Baltimore at Douglas Memorial Community Church, his first senior pastorate.

In his introduction for the prayer service, Archbishop Lori said the goal for the evening was to "remember that tragic day 50 years ago when we lost one of the greatest leaders our nation has ever produced: Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr."

"And though we come together on this anniversary of his death, it is his life and his legacy that we come together to recall and to reflect on and to embrace," he said.

"Fifty years after the death of his earthly body, his spirit and his words and his example continue to be present among us. And what a true tragedy it would be if we ever stop opening our hearts and our minds to the teachings he shared with us, not only in words but in actions," the archbishop added.

He also noted that April 12 was the third anniversary of the arrest of Freddie Gray Jr., whose death from injuries suffered in police custody touched off days of unrest in the city.

"We do more than pray for our beloved city and for each other," Archbishop Lori said. "As we saw three years ago in communities all over the city, people helped each other, neighbors of every race and creed helped their fellow neighbor.

“And that is the story of Baltimore that you won’t see on the news. And it’s a story that I and my colleagues here tonight are determined to tell, along with our mayor and our city councilmen and women and our police commissioner – and we’ll keep telling it until hope conquers fear and until people begin to think of Baltimore as a city of neighborhoods and not a city of violence,” he said to applause.

Rev. Warnock also reflected on the Freddie Gray anniversary, noting that Gray lost his life in 2015, “but I submit to you, Baltimore, that as tragic as those incidents are they are tragic and predictable. Because while we abhor police brutality, and Dr. King was talking about police brutality – did you know that? – in 1963. He said, ‘Some are asking, “When will we be satisfied?” We will not be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim. As long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.’ He said that in the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech,” the preacher said.

Rev. King “recognized that there was racial bias and he was honest about it. Translation: It was the 1963 version of ‘Black Lives Matter.’ Don’t get mad at me and don’t get mad when folks say, ‘black lives matter.’

“That’s part of what it means to be an oppressed people,” Rev. Warnock said. “All lives matter, of course. And that’s the point.”

He called Rev. King a truth-teller. “He was the best kind of patriot because he loved the country enough to tell the country the truth.”

And the country needs more of that today, he said in his sermon. “Now is the time for truth-telling. Now is it time to call the nation to be the best. To stand tall with moral excellence. To push past the predictable partisan arguments of the public square and catch a glimpse of the vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

“It’s bigger than Republican politics, bigger than Democratic politics,” he added. “It

is God's vision of a new heaven and new earth. And whenever people of faith catch a vision of what God intends, it makes folks on the right and the left uncomfortable," the preacher said.

In an interview before the prayer service, he said the country needs more of the nonviolent civil disobedience espoused by Rev. King, and which Archbishop Lori promoted in a pastoral letter released in February, "The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Principles of Nonviolence."

Rev. Warnock said, "We are living in an evil time. The country is deeply divided, and the church is strangely silent at a time when we need - sorely need - a voice of faith and moral courage."

He also touched on themes of criminal justice and prisons, poverty, and healing America in the 45-minute sermon, which was punctuated by applause and "Amens" from the congregation.

Faith traditions represented at the prayer service included Muslim, Jewish, Mormon, Baptist, Lutheran and Catholic. Civic leaders, including Pugh, DeSousa and others from government, participated.

A combined gospel choir, led by Kenyatta Hardison, music director at Cardinal Shehan School, led the congregation in song. Her school's choir, now famous for its viral video and appearances on local and national TV, sang its rendition of Andra Day's "Rise Up."

To see more photos or purchase prints, visit our Smugmug gallery [here](#).