



**Fall Convocation – September 7, 2017**  
**Opening Remarks**  
**Michael Jenkins**  
**President, Louisville Seminary**

For the past few weeks I have wrestled with what to say to you today. We have witnessed terrible things over the past months and weeks. And we have seen some of the most heinous acts either given tacit justification or only feebly denounced by the highest political office in the land. While many have grieved and lamented, others have cheered these actions.



If it is true that when we cast good things upon the waters, in time good things will flourish, it is also true that cruelty, bigotry, hatred and violence once unleashed among a people have a way of replicating and multiplying and seeking further self-justification.

Like you, I have wondered what we can do. As I mentioned, many of us have lamented and grieved, have been horrified, and have spoken out against the actions and words we deplored. I also felt angry. Maybe you did too. But, most of all, as I reflected on those cruel and violent elements in society that are crawling out from their shadowy hiding places, I realized that we cannot allow our actions to be used either as an excuse for violent and cruel reactions or merely to enable inaction and the status quo.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, many years ago, wrote a classic educational text titled, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. I took my own worn copy down from the bookshelf recently, and, reading from the chapter titled, "Crap Detecting," I noted their midrash on the most commonly asked question of children when they come home from school: "What did you learn today?" This simple question, the authors say, has assumed monumental and terrifying proportions in our society, and is immensely important for all of us. Why? Because, as they explain: "We just may not survive another generation of inadvertent entropy helpers."

So it was with these thoughts in mind that I returned to read again one of the most remarkable, perhaps even miraculous, documents in American history. And today, I am going to give all of us a homework assignment to read it, even if, like me, you have read it many, many times. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*. I believe it may be the most important thing any of us could possibly read and ponder right now.

Most people of my generation were taught by Dr. King that love without justice is merely sentimentalism, but justice without love is only vengeance. If we wish to see justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream, then our means must fit our ends, wrote Dr. King. Surely we must find the right levers of power if we are to bring meaningful and lasting change, but if love is not our means, we will find no love in our ends.

Dr. King taught how to make love an instrument for justice, not only to win rights and freedom for those who are disenfranchised and oppressed, but to change the hearts and minds both of those who passively allow injustice to flourish and actively breed hatred. He explains that the end we are seeking is redemption and reconciliation. "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness."

What must we do? Lament and grief are understandable, of course, but the justice of God demands that we do not return evil for evil. Rather than to allow the agents of cynicism and violence to hold us captive in their own hopeless lies, we have a sacred duty to awaken ourselves to all the ways we may be aiding and abetting hatred and enabling the powers that paralyze souls. We have a sacred duty to love justice and to infuse justice with love.

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