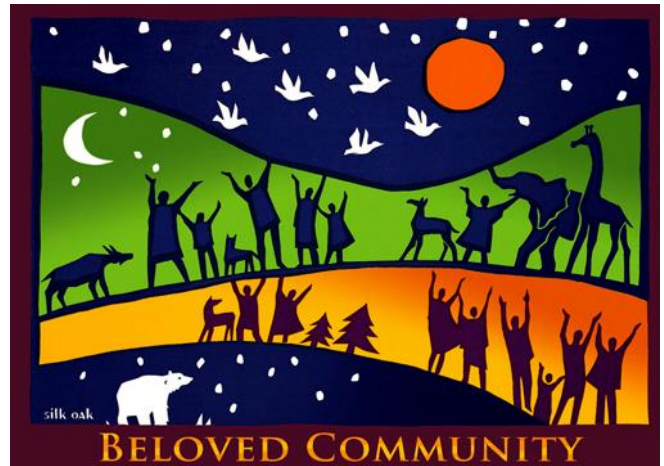


**First and Center
Pastor's Blog
Center Church, Hartford
January 15, 2019**

Today is actually the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. Today we remember the struggle and the victories, the dreams and fears, the boldness and tenacity that marked his leadership. We give thanks to God for Dr. King, and we passionately pray for more leaders like him to rise up in these times when our country seems so adrift.



2019 also brings us the 400th anniversary of the first ship carrying slaves arriving on the shores of what would become the United States. We need to remember and mark this anniversary, as well as Dr. King's birthday. The majority of African people present on our shores were enslaved here for many more years than most people of African descent have been free. Say that to yourself a few times. And remember that even after legal freedom was granted, the powerful white people in both the north and the south made sure that freedom carried powerful limitations: politically, economically, socially, educationally, and in the justice system.

It is folly to think that either the Emancipation Proclamation or the work of Dr. King finished the job of undoing generations of enslavement, racism, and exploitation of African Americans. Those who thought the election of Barack Obama put an end to the awful history of racism in this country saw that illusion shattered by young white men marching in Charlottesville with torches and the rise of white supremacy all the way up to the halls of power in Washington, D.C.

The work continues, with strong leaders like the Rev. William Barber and the Moral Mondays movement; but even more importantly, it needs to continue in the heart of every American of every race and ethnicity. The Beloved Community will never exist as long as it's easily romanticized as just a "dream." What work do you and I need to do today, in our own minds, at work, at home, in our communities, in our church to keep moving forward?

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,
Transitional Minister