

Build a beloved community

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Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a time for people to remember the civil rights movement, celebrate King's life and his message and give back with service to the community.

The message and spirit of this day should not be limited to just one out of 365. Naomi Tutu expressed to the Austin community that it's so much more; it's about embracing human differences, reaching the point of "a beloved community" and using the gifts we've been given as human beings.

"What is needed where you are today?" Tutu said. "Who is hungry in Austin? Who is homeless? And what are you going to do about that?"

"Because if you are able to turn Austin into a model of the beloved community, if you are able to make this community a place of justice and respect for one another, you have already moved the rest of the world closer to a beloved community."

The daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Naomi Tutu spoke Monday evening at Riverland Community College as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration put on by the Austin Human Rights Commission.

Tutu received a standing ovation.

"This is the place where I feel that I am doing what I am called to do," Tutu said. "It is a wonderful gift."

Tutu acknowledged how easy it is to set aside a day to honor King and celebrate the civil rights movement, to make it a day of service to the community. It's also wonderful that there are parties and gatherings, like the MLK breakfast she spoke at in Minneapolis on Monday.

With that day of celebration also comes an element of failure.

"We have fallen short of the reality that Dr. King called us to," Tutu said. "To live our whole lives striving for peace and justice."

It's also not just about the acts of service that people do for others, it's "about how we live in community, in communion with our fellow human beings," Tutu said.

She focused on looking at the differences among people in a different way — through the eyes of children. They notice differences, and they aren't afraid to tell you what they notice, as Tutu illustrated with a story of an encounter she had with a boy on an airplane.

"Wouldn't it be great if we were all like children?" Tutu said. "They look at difference as an opportunity to learn something new about the world."

"As an opportunity, not a threat."

That was a fundamental message that King tried to communicate, she said.

Differences do not need to be a cause for fear, they can be a chance to see how great the world is, Tutu said. Underneath it all, we remain human beings, each with the same dreams and fears. So people are all called to act in a way that makes the most sense to us, to be activists in our own communities, Tutu said.

Each one of us has at least one gift, something that we do better than anyone else. King used his gift of oratory "as a way to heal a wounded nation, to move us closer to the beloved community of which he spoke," Tutu said.

Using those gifts to make Austin, Minnesota, the United States, "a better place" may be as simple as reaching out to one other person, she said.

"You'll be amazed at the opportunities that come into your life," Tutu said.