

Reflection by Rachel Kelley '12 (Faiths Act in Togetherness and Hope)

University Public Worship Multifaith Commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Sunday, January 22, 2012

When Dr. King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he was looking out at thousands of people - thousands of people who each, in some way, had joined a vast struggle against oppression and violence. Dr. King looked out on the crowd, and he said, "I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations...Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution."

Whether those storms look different today or whether they look the same, storms of persecution are as *real* now as they were in 1963.

When I think of such storms, I think about Kathy, the single mother of a developmentally disabled young man named Drew. I visited their house in rural Tennessee last spring. Kathy only buys canned foods on sale so she can afford Drew's medical supplies. She's one of 49 million Americans wondering where their next meals will come from.

I think about Salvador, the smiling son of farm workers I met on an ASB trip. He was born with a condition that weakened his lungs. He grew up breathing the semi-truck exhaust and the agricultural chemicals of the Central Valley, some of the most polluted air in the US. His dad worked tirelessly for less than minimum wage, without knowing whether he would have a job the next day. He couldn't afford to leave the fields to be with Salvador, who spent his last 22 days of life in our Stanford hospital. He was 14.

I think about Dee, the woman I met outside of a DC metro station. She initially asked me for money, but then she asked for a copy of the newspaper sports section. Her son is the star of his high school's football team. He lives below the poverty line, like one third of all children in DC. Nine out of ten of these children are Black.

Our neighbors are trapped in torrential injustices. It can be terrifying and tiring to brave such persecuting storms. I tell you these stories to honor Kathy's, Salvador's, and Dee's bravery. But stories are about more than remembering; they are also about reminding. We remind ourselves that the quest for freedom is not over. We remind ourselves why we will brave the storm over and over again. When Dr. King looked into the faces of thousands of brave Americans, he asked them for a reminder. "We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now" he said. "So let us not wallow in the valley of despair.....[read the rest of Dr. King's speech here:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>]