

“Beyond” Sermon for May 13, 2018,
Psalm 1, Acts 1:8-11, Ephesians 1:19-23

49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:49 NIV

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The Black African American citizens of Montgomery, Alabama decided that they would support the Montgomery Improvement Association’s initiative to boycott the buses of that city, they faced overwhelming odds—the bus company, the city council, the chamber of Commerce, the mayor and police.”

But there was a diminutive, quiet Sunday school teacher at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, one Dr. Jo Ann Robinson, who taught at Alabama State. Because she taught literature there, she could not take a leadership position in the Montgomery Improvement Assn, but she was a board member. Nevertheless, after the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat so that a white man could sit down, she helped organize the first one-day boycott of the buses and along with her students,

ran off and passed out hundreds of fliers for the citizens of Montgomery. After the success of the one-day boycott, Dr. Robinson along with Rev. Ralph D Abernathy and other pastors, E. D. Nixon of the Pullman Porters, and others, organized the MIA, working behind the scenes.

When Jo Ann heard the strong resistance given by officials and business leaders, God put it on her heart to approach her new pastor, a small, young preacher, newly ordained and still working on his doctorate at Boston, University. He had shared with the congregation that he had been encouraged to take a position in the North, but that the Spirit of God had compelled him to return to a pulpit in the South after his graduation from Colgate Rochester Divinity School, and the completion of his residency requirement at Boston. It would be difficult to complete his PhD, while serving in Montgomery, but

he had heard the still small voice of God compelling him to go there.

Dr. Robinson would not be intimidated by the voices of racist resistance, the threat of losing her job, or the courage it took in 1955 to approach her young, educated pastor, and literally demand that he take leadership of the boycott. Pastor King, like herself, was a native of Georgia. She later wrote that she clearly saw the signs from God concerning what she had to do. She had to go beyond her role as a parishioner. She had to go beyond her place as a woman in 1955. She had to go beyond her role as a professor of literature. She had to go beyond her role as the wife of a husband and a mother.

As the letter to the church at Ephesus so clearly states, the resurrection of Jesus Christ calls us to join with Christ, to go beyond our present

circumstances and consider ourselves to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. Those who stood up against the fear of economic reprisals, of social disapproval, of threats to life and property, understood that through Christ's resurrection from the dead, they had been placed in a powerful position, far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come.

Just as God had put all things under the authority of Christ and had made him head over all things for the benefit of the church, so now everyone and everything that stood against God's justice, love and human fulfillment was instead of being a threat, was both malleable and changeable. Through the resurrection of Christ, God not only empowers us to move beyond circumstances, threats, challenges and difficulties, but God empowers us to bring things

to completion. God empowers us to right wrongs. God empowers us to create fairness where there is none. God empowers us to bring understanding where there is confusion, and in that empowering, God opens doors so that we can see beyond, even before we exercise the faith to move beyond that which would deny us all that we and our world are meant to be. God empowered mothers like Dr. Jo Ann Robinson, Mrs. Annie Devine, and that mother of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks, to go beyond the rolls that caste, class, gender and race has prescribed for them. Through the resurrection we are called to move beyond the limits of our present, to the glory of Christ's future for us. We are called to be co-participants in the creation of the kingdom of God. Amen.