

From Ages to Ages – God Throughout History

This month's reflection is taken from the book *Stand Your Ground*¹ by Kelly Brown Douglas.

The Rev. Canon Kelly Brown Douglas is the Canon Theologian at the Washington National Cathedral. In 2017, she was named Dean of Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She is considered a leader in the field of womanist theology, racial reconciliation and sexuality and the black church. She wrote *Stand Your Ground* as a result of the murder of Trayvon Martin – and the many others that followed.

“Moral memory is nothing less than telling the truth about the past and one's relationship to it. Moral memory is not about exonerating ourselves from the past. Rather, it is taking responsibility for it. To have a moral memory is to recognize the past we carry within us, the past we want to carry within us, and the past we need to make right. Righting the past is about more than facile apologies or even guilty verdicts for killers of innocent black children. Rather, to right the past is to acknowledge the ways in which our systems, structures, and ways of being in society are a continuation of the myths, the narratives, the ideologies of the past and then to transform these present realities.

Moral identity recognizes, as Paul Tillich says, “that every human soul has infinite value.” A moral identity is what Tillich calls the “courage to be oneself.” To be oneself is to be the child of God that one is, nothing more and nothing less. A moral identity, therefore, is free from any “social usages and customs” that distort the identity of another's creation . . . It is this identity that makes possible “sympathetic understanding.” . . . it opens one to move through the world with empathy, thus feeling the suffering, the heartache, the hunger of others for life, liberty, and happiness. In many respects, a moral identity is the human response to Jesus . . . the way in which he emptied himself of anything that would set him apart from humanity, especially crucified humanity.

[Moral] participation is marked by a commitment to freedom, love, and life. Such participation is a matter of faith. The Greek word for faith, as used in the Gospels, is *pistis*. This word does not suggest a way of thinking about who God is or reflecting upon to God's relationship to us. Rather, it points to a way of acting in light of our relationship to God. Put simply, faith is not about loyalty to a certain doctrine, dogma or set of beliefs. Instead, it involves commitment to a certain way of “living and moving and having our being” in the world. . . To have faith is to accept the invitation to be an “active presence in human history.”

How shall we, as God's people, accept the invitation to be an active presence in human history?

¹ Douglas, Kelly Brown, *Stand Your Ground*, Orbis Books, 2015, Part 2, Section 6