



The Perfect Tribute

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ATLANTA.

Between confrontations and marches, honors and imprisonments Martin Luther King Jr. always went home to the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

They brought him back for the last time yesterday, and the people bade him farewell in a way that explained his life and restored gentleness to his death.

At the Ebenezer Baptist Church, which is small and plain, the members never had any trouble accepting the prophet within their midst. They believe in signs and wonders as told by the Bible. Prophecies, dreams and visions sustain them.

The service was intimate and personal as befitted a beloved pastor. It was decorous as befitted a world leader and martyr. His favorite scripture was read, his favorite hymns were sung by the splendid choir, as would have been done with any other member of the church.

There was one difference. Out of deference to the presence of half the Cabinet, the Vice President, three Presidential candidates, high church dignitaries, and Mrs. John F. Kennedy, the usual lamentations had been curbed.

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One woman, chafing under the restraint, cried out finally, "Oh, Martin, we're not goin' to see you no more," but reproving looks were turned on her, and she quieted.

Christian resignation is a powerful theme at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Martin Luther King had prophesied his own death. When his wife heard of it, she simply said it was the will of God.

The congregation was willing to follow this lead, but when the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, his friend and successor, read a quotation from Dr. King about the triumph of good over evil, one man standing by the wall shook his head doubtfully and his shoulders shook with sobs.

The members, whenever they could, thanked the celebrities and the representatives of 35 foreign countries who were among the thousands who came. But they had strained mightily to make the goodbye their own. Mrs. King, a queen-

ly woman whose strong, piquant face never wavered, had directed all with a careful eye to her husband's spirit. The Negroes, for once, had the best seats, directly in front of the coffin.

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One white man spoke. He was a bald, bespectacled former teacher of Dr. King's. His name was Dr. L. Harold DeWolfe. His message was the same as that of the others, love and hope.

The absence of rancor, in view of the broken-glass curses of the cities, was striking. The only reproach came from Dr. Abernathy, when he felt the congregation had sung with insufficient feeling Martin's "most favorite hymn." He exhorted them to sing it as *he* would have, and the choir led the church through five more stanzas of "Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling."

And another favorite, "My Heavenly Father Watches Over Me," which Mrs. Mary Gurley had "always sung for Martin" when he came home.

It said something for Dr. King's taste that he valued Mrs. Gurley's contralto. When she sang "Let the Billows Roar" in tones true as steel, the people began to call out, "Oh, yes, oh yes, He surely cares, oh, yes."

The Rev. Andrew Young, Dr. King's bright-eyed shadow on a hundred marches, at a thousand meetings, his clerical robe over his denim suit, put his head back and let the tears roll.

Dr. Abernathy, following tradition, reported that at Martin Luther King's last meal before he was shot he announced he himself was fasting until he felt "ready for the task before me."

Then Dr. Abernathy read from the speeches while the organist softly played "We Shall Overcome" and tears glistened on the cheeks of the choir. Finally a tape was played of his famous and prophetic last speech with its blueprint for a eulogy: "Tell I tried to love somebody."

Dr. Abernathy said Martin Luther King was "a peculiar man," by which he meant that King was a Christian. Seeing him evoked with such tenderness by his own, it was impossible not to believe.