

# Reflections of Stained Glass <sup>Window</sup> from Pulpit of 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church

ESSAY. In 2013, upon attending the 50th anniversary of the bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church, Marna B. Williams wrote this reflection of her experience in the pulpit of that church in 1967, when she was invited to speak on "unity."

## WHO AM I ? WHY AM I HERE ?

Who am I, Lord? Why am I here?

I am so small, and your universe is so vast and diverse.

I am here in this historic church to speak on Unity.

I remember how shocked I was when some home-grown terrorists tossed a bomb through a window of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and killed four little girls. My husband and I were riding home from worship with our four children in the back seat of our car when I heard the news on the radio. "Those children could have been our children", I exclaimed. Understanding a Mother's Love for her children, my heart was moved with empathy for those four Mothers. In the past, I had talked about love and justice, now I wanted to act upon my beliefs.

I joined a group of young women in our church to go into the nearby black neighborhood to listen to their needs and be an equal partner with them in planning a program to meet those needs. The recent Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave us the legal right to ask for community resources previously denied them. We call ourselves "The Mustard Seed at Southtown Housing Project". Through planning, acting, and reflecting together, we have become a community of loving friends who support one another. At the same time, my inclusion in that community has shattered my communication with my parents, my husband and his Mother, and many of my friends. They love me, but believe my behavior is a threat to their way of life. I do not want to argue with them, so we do not talk about it.

So, here I am, Lord, standing in the pulpit where Dr. Martin Luther King preached on non-violent protest before sending the people out to march for Civil Rights. I was invited here by the black churches of Birmingham, to represent "The Mustard Seed" and preach on "Unity", during Brotherhood Week.

I am looking across the Sanctuary at a stained -glass window which was recently installed to commemorate the four children whose lives were shattered by prejudice and violence. Donations poured in from people all over the world for artisans to weld together pieces of stained glass and create a whole new work of art.. It is a picture of a black man leaning forward toward unity, and looking backwards toward reconciliation. The sunlight comes through transparent glass to form the shape of a shining cross upon his shoulders. This is what my life is like in the Mustard Seed Community: making the kingdom of God transparent in the here and now. We are leaning forward toward building a world community through mutual respect and love, and looking back toward reconciliation with loved ones who embrace their cultural traditions.

Here I am. The whole congregation is listening attentively to hear me speak, and I am struck dumb with shock and awe.

Marna B. Williams wrote this reflection shortly after she attended the 50th Anniversary Commemoration at the 16th Street Baptist Church. Reflections at age 87 of the Sunday in 1967 when she stood in the pulpit, momentarily speechless, after being invited by Black churches to represent the Mustard Seed Project and preach on "unity" at the 16th Street Baptist Church in celebration of Brotherhood Week 1967.

by Marna Williams