

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

When I was a student at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, I remember attending a special presentation on campus. The speaker was the poet and writer, Maya Angelou. She had written poems and autobiographies about her life as an African-American, but at the time, I didn't know anything about her! I hadn't read any of her poetry. I hadn't read any of her books. I didn't know her life story. My sociology professor had encouraged my classmates and I to attend her presentation, so I did.

The event was held in the Student Union. I arrived about five or ten minutes before it started (not realizing that it would be so popular). The room was packed, so I ended up standing in the back. This was of little matter, because she kept us all engaged, and the time passed quickly (actually, too quickly).

She talked about her life of hardship and oppression. She shared some of her beautiful, thought-provoking poems from her book, [I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings](#). The book is an autobiography about her early life--the challenges she faced, and the emotions she experienced. She expressed many of her feelings through her poetry. A metaphor that she uses in her book is "of a bird trying to escape its cage, [It] is a central image throughout the work." (Wikipedia)

February is Black History Month. It is a time when we are encouraged to remember African-American people whose lives have made, or are now making, a difference in the United States and world. We recall the many people who faced pain, suffering, hardships, oppression, and more. We recall the many people who through no fault of their own, became someone's property. We celebrate the many African-Americans who used non-violent means to educate others about the need for equality, justice and peace.

As Christian believers, we know that God loves all that God created. God loves us no matter what our race or ethnicity may be! As we will see in some of the examples in our upcoming Bible Study during Lent, we are called by God to be change agents in the world. How we do this depends on our spiritual gifts and the Holy Spirit working within us.

Today, the name, Maya Angelou, is known throughout the world, but as a college student, until I heard her speak, her name was unknown to me. Therefore, I would like to encourage you, especially during Black History Month, to learn about African-American people who have worked, and/or are currently working, for positive change. There are many television specials, movies, newspaper articles, and books that you can access for this purpose. Together, we can increase our knowledge and understanding of persons who are African-American. They are human beings who deserve to have their stories shared. They are human beings who have shaped our world, often through their resilience.

Let us celebrate Black History Month and the contributions of the many African-Americans who have sought to make the world a better place. Let us use our new

understandings to encourage God's justice and peace for all humankind.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy