

His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope written by Jon Meachem

We had a great discussion of Jon Meachem's book *His Truth is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* led by Diane Dougherty in Soapstone's Dismantling Racism Book Group.

Meachem says about Lewis: "The world was one way before John Lewis came out of Pike County and into the maelstrom of history, and it was another way when he was done."

The book focuses on those five years when John Lewis took part in lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, TN; became a Freedom Rider integrating bus transportation and being brutally assaulted in Rock Hill, SC; became chair of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee; was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington; participated in the Freedom Summer movement to register blacks to vote in Mississippi; and led the march over the bridge in Selma, AL where police knocked him down, beat him so that he received a concussion, tear-gassed the crowd and drove them back with police mounted on horseback.

He was taught non-violence by Methodist pastor Jim Lawson in preparing for the lunch counter sit-ins and practiced this philosophy all through these protests. He was arrested more than 40 times, placed in jail and spent time at Parchman Prison. His challenges to the system helped push Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Meachem writes: "In the middle of the last century, Lewis marched into the line of fire to summon a nation to be what it had long said it would be but had failed to become. Arrested 45 times over the course of his life, Lewis suffered a fractured skull and was repeatedly beaten and tear-gassed. He led by example more than words. He was a peaceful soldier in the cause of a religiously inspired understanding of humanity and America. And he bent history to his will – though he would insist the important thing was not his will, but God's."

As a companion piece to the book, several of us watched the CNN documentary *Good Trouble* where Lewis calls on people to stand up in the face of evil and get into *Good Trouble* to fix it. Throughout much of the movie, people approach Lewis to thank him for his leadership in civil rights and for his long service in the U.S. Congress. In the movie, you hear him tell the chicken story and hear his brothers and sisters talk about him going to school in a suit and tie, carrying a Bible.

We agreed that Lewis's life was inspiring and filled us with hope. We talked about what we as a church could do to live up to his goals. We noted some things we were already doing and the need to network with others. We talked about the need to dismantle practices that stood in the way of equity, love and Christian love of neighbor.

I loved the book-its religious tone, its praise for nonviolence and servant leadership and the picture it paints of a great American who Meachem calls a saint.