Thank you for that kind introduction. I also want to thank the choir for the beautiful selections.

It is both special to be asked and impossible to say no to friends. Loretta Green and Cecillie Vaughters-Johnson told me I had to be here and so I am.

It is hard work to keep the dream alive and this effort is far more important than most people realize. The entire planning committee deserves our thanks for putting this day together.

I want to talk about three things this afternoon:

First, I want to talk about the Dr. King that we admire and whose leadership we rightfully celebrate but whose legacy has been so distorted as to now undermine the very principles that he fought and died for.

Second, I want to talk about the “other” Dr. King that few seem to remember and whose legacy is seldom mentioned.

Lastly, I want to talk about how we can honor Dr. King’s courageous leadership and compassion despite controversy.

Since we are in church, let’s resolve to use this spiritual place as a safe space to have honest conversation. Looking at past or current injustices can be painful. However, to truly appreciate the sacrifices that have been made or that will be required means that we must talk about things as they were and as they are and not how we would prefer or pretend for them to be. I ask your permission and forgiveness, just within these walls, to try to do this.

**Remembering Dr. King**

So, who was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how is he remembered? Dr. King was a country preacher. He believed that each person should have the same opportunities to succeed or fail based on their talent regardless of race, religion or birthplace.

Dr. King lived in a time, not so long ago, where African Americans who simply voiced a belief in social and political equality risked being fired from their jobs, false imprisonment, beatings, being mauled by dogs, having their homes or churches bombed or being murdered.
Dr. King and the thousands who participated in the Civil Rights movement risked and often paid the price for any person to drink from the same water fountain, sit in any open seat on the bus, walk in the front door of any place of business, sit at and be served at the lunch counter, live where they could afford to buy the house and go to the school that fit their interests and aptitude. While it is seldom acknowledged, all people of color – Latinos and Asians – as well as white women benefited from the sacrifices of African Americans and their few friends to secure equal rights for all.

The humiliation endured by African Americans didn’t happen in the ancient past. It was the daily life experienced by my father, my mother, my grandparents and many people in this very room. We owe a great debt to these individuals who suffered ongoing humiliation, refused to resort to anger or violence, and taught their children to believe in the promise of America.

I see some shoulders starting to get tense. I am simply describing how it really was. We do an injustice to the sacrifices that were made when we sugarcoat the way things were. Besides, I haven’t gotten to the point for you to get tense yet. I will tell you when.

Impossibly, incredibly, unbelievably, Dr. King proved that love could conquer violence and that understanding could conquer hate and bigotry. If Dr. King’s life and the Civil Rights Movement had been a movie plot we would have said it could never happen. However, we bear witness that it did happen.

What is popularly taught and said today about Dr. King goes something like this. In 1963, Dr. King led a March on Washington and delivered his famous “I have a Dream” speech. The next year, the country passed the Civil Rights Act and, a year after that, passed the Voting Rights Act. From there the country started down the road of social and political equality which was achieved in 2008 with the election of Barrack Obama as first African American President of the United States.

It is now said that we have entered the Promised Land of a color-blind, post racial society where race no longer matters. We have reached the mountain top, the dream has been fulfilled – end of story. In fact, even the collection of data and comparing results by race is considered by some to be inherently racist and inconsistent with what we are told was Dr. King's vision of a color-blind America.

This is the fairytale that we now tell about the civil rights movement. It has just enough truth to sound accurate while actually turning Dr. King’s dream into a nightmare. Dr. King’s concern for social and political equality was always aimed at collective advancement and not individual success.

Speaking in 1967, after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, Dr. King said:
“Now, in order to answer the question, “Where do we go from here?” which is our theme, we must first honestly recognize where we are now. … Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites.”

He went on to say that this was the case whether the question related to income, housing, employment or schooling. Sadly, despite individual successes, African Americans continue to experience double the economic hardships of white Americans and in some areas it is now triple. Time does not allow for me to go through the litany of depressing statistics. For those who are interested, I would encourage you to Google the report, “A Strong Start: Positioning Young Black Boys for Educational Success.” This well done, but misnamed report, is about far more than just education or young black boys.

The mythology of a dream realized is especially damaging because it conveys the false impression that the struggle for racial and political equality is over. It allows people who would have never marched with Dr. King or supported his dream to claim that racism is no longer a factor in American life. It also misleads those of us who would be champions of the dream into believing that our work is done.

Examples abound that show that the cup of American social and political equality is only half to three-quarters full. The recent anti-immigrant laws in both Georgia and Arizona vividly demonstrate that race and national origin still matter in America. Let’s be honest, the a focus of the anti-immigration laws is on Latinos and not on stopping the flow of illegal Chinese immigrants who are brought here and virtually enslaved working in restaurants and providing foot massages. Why is that?

Notwithstanding the Voting Rights Act, 12 states have made it more difficult for people to vote. Let me tell you about Alabama, Kansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin. Each of these states has enacted new requirements that voters must show government issued identification before voting. This all sounds perfectly reasonable until you realize that 10 percent of US citizens do not have such identification including 18 percent of young voters and 25 percent of African Americans.

Ok, now your shoulders can be tense, but I want you to understand me clearly. Without a doubt, America has travelled a long, long way on the path of social and racial equality, however; we still have miles to go. Let me give you just one more example. Just last month the Justice Department announced the largest ever residential fair-lending settlement of $335 million with Countrywide Financial, now owned by Bank of America.

Countrywide systematically charged higher rates and fees to more than 200,000 minority borrowers than they charged to white borrowers with the same credit risk. They also intentionally
steered more than 10,000 minority borrowers into subprime mortgages at the same time white borrowers with similar credit histories received regular loans. This didn’t happen to just a few people, it didn’t happen just one time, it didn’t happen by accident, it wasn’t done a couple of people who didn’t understand the rules, and it didn’t happen in the distant past.

Honoring Dr. King’s legacy requires us to speak forcefully in opposition to those who would distort his message and suggest that political and social equality in America has been fully achieved.

**Remembering the “Other” King**

I now would like to introduce you to the “other” Dr. King who few know about and who is never celebrated. Let’s go back in time to 1967.

- It is 4 years after the March on Washington.
- It is 3 years after the Civil Rights Act and Dr. King’s selection as the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner at age 35.
- It is 2 years after passage of the Voting Rights Act.
- It is a year before Dr. King’s assassination and he is deep in planning for the poor People’s March on Washington.
- Dr. King is at the ripe old age of 39 and a year away from an assassin’s bullet when he asks the question of himself and the movement: Where Do We Go from Here?

This is how he answers the question:

“I want to say to you as I move to my conclusion, as we talk about “Where do we go from here,” that we honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here. And one day we must ask the question, “Why are there forty million poor people in America?” …

“Now, when I say question the whole society, it means ultimately coming to see that the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.”

Dr. King had not abandoned notions of race. On the contrary, he had come to the realization that he and the movement had to see that the issues of race, economic class exploitation, and war are intertwined and inseparable.

Recent Census statistics show that the gap between the rich and poor is growing. Dr. King talked about 40 million people in poverty. Today, 46 million Americans live in poverty. Equally disturbing are recent studies showing that if you are born poor you are likely to stay poor. These data challenge the belief in an America that is upwardly mobile for all.
Honoring Dr. King’s Legacy

So how do we honor the legacies of the Dr. King we celebrate and the “other” Dr. King that relatively few know? We have a choice to make. We can see the dream as fulfilled in which case his birthday is cause for an annual celebration and remembrance of sacrifices past. Or, we can treat Dr. King’s birthday as an annual revival aimed at rejuvenating us to complete the journey that he and others started. This path will require us to take risks, make sacrifices and give of our time, talent and treasure. Let me ask you: Are you prepared to walk in Dr. King’s footsteps, speak truth to power and demonstrate leadership and compassion despite controversy?

If you are:
• What would Dr. King say about the war in Afghanistan?
• What would Dr. King say about national, state and local policies that are cutting education, housing and healthcare?
• What would Dr. King, who was planning a Poor People’s March on Washington, say about the Occupy Movement?

However, we don’t have to take on issues of national and state policy to walk in Dr. King’s footsteps; all we have to do is have the courage to open our eyes and look right here at home.

Right here, right now in Palo Alto, people who have lost their homes and have no place else to go are fighting for the right and dignity to just sleep in their cars so that they can stay in the community that they love. Are you prepared to walk in Dr. King’s footsteps, speak truth to power and demonstrate leadership and compassion despite controversy?

Right here, right now, in Palo Alto public schools, some teachers and parents believe that Palo Alto and Gunn high schools should continue teaching only accelerated, advanced math courses for the most gifted students, a practice that disproportionately excludes kids of color, rather than provide math courses that actually meet the college entrance requirements for a California state university and would allow more students, especially kids of color, to be college bound. Are you prepared to walk in Dr. King’s footsteps, speak truth to power and demonstrate leadership and compassion despite controversy?

Right here, right now, in San Mateo County kids of color from Ravenswood Elementary school who have passed 8th grade math and have scored proficient on standardized tests upon entering Sequoia High School are disproportionately placed in remedial math making it far less likely that they will be on track to meet the requirements for a California state university. At the same time, students from Menlo Park elementary, who are predominantly white, and have the same math grades and test scores as the students from Ravenswood are placed by Sequoia high school administrators in college track or advanced math courses. Are you prepared to walk in Dr. King’s footsteps, speak truth to power and demonstrate leadership and compassion despite controversy?

Conclusion
Let me conclude with what Dr. King said in the last Sunday morning sermon he would deliver:

“Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet ... we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

I believe that those of us who live in the Valley, the center of the tech revolution, have an obligation to make the global neighborhood that we have created into a global brotherhood. We can take the first steps, right here at home, if we are willing to speak truth to power and demonstrate leadership and compassion despite controversy.