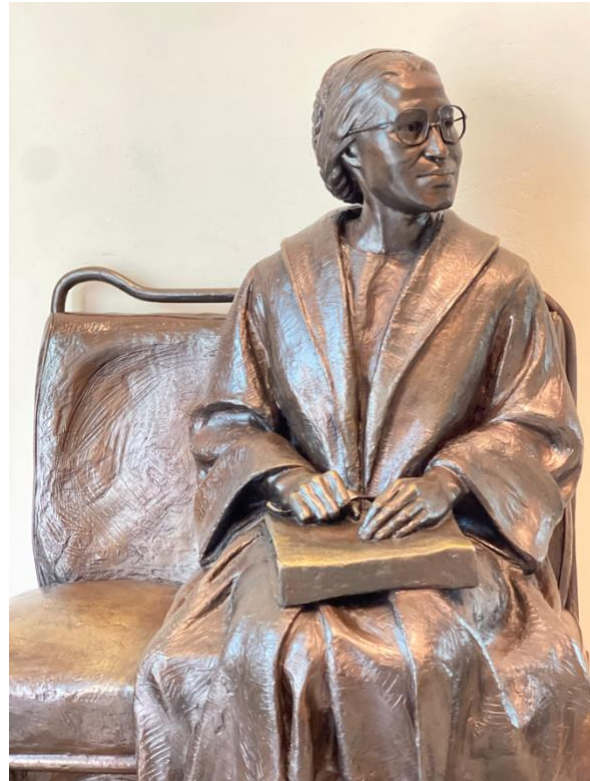


**Civil Rights Pilgrimage: Day 4 and 5 – Saturday, June 3 and Sunday, June 4  
From the Rev. Mary Laymon**

Day Four (Sat) of our Civil Rights Pilgrimage took us first the Southern Poverty Law Center. There we gathered first around the memorial dedicated to the 40 Martyrs of the Movement, a beautiful, somber water sculpture created by the woman who designed the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC. Once inside, after going through security screenings, a sad necessity, we walked through an exhibit telling the story of each martyr. I heard stories I recognized like, the three college students slain by the KKK, whose bodies were buried in an earthen dam. And stories that were new to me, like Viola, the housewife and mother from Detroit, who drove alone to Alabama to help with the



Selma march after seeing televised reports of the attack at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. As we walked through the exhibits I found myself grateful again for all the storytellers, each one shining a light on a particular part of the Civil Rights story.

We had one more stop in Montgomery after lunch: the Rosa Parks Library. This storytelling venue created an experience designed to engage the youngest audiences. With a creative story bus, we went back in time, learned where the term “Jim Crow” originated, and then with videos, and replicas of bus seats and cars, took a deep dive into the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Again, something I knew from other history lessons, but realized for the first time that this event launched Dr. Martin Luther King into his Civil Rights work. He was a young pastor when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus. It is quite the story to discover how many different ways the city of Montgomery tried to shut down the bus boycott, and how creatively the black community in Montgomery kept it going.

We then boarded our vans for the hour long drive to Selma. In Selma, we experienced the quintessential pilgrimage moment. Cameron, who has been managing the logistics of this experience faultlessly, went to check us into our hotel, only to be told by the front desk manager they had no rooms for us. They did acknowledge we had a reservation, but tried to



blame Cameron that they weren't expecting us. After much frustrating fault-finding, they began calling other hotels trying to find us a home for the night. The gracious priest from St. Paul's Episcopal, upon hearing of our dilemma, began calling members of her parish, also looking for beds for us. In good pilgrimage fashion, our group of weary travelers took the change in venue in stride, and settled happily into the Hampton and Holiday Inn for the night. Realizing Selma was not prepared to welcome us, we canceled our 2<sup>nd</sup> night there, and headed back to Georgia a day early.

But not before we worshipped with the good people of St. Paul's on Sunday, enjoyed an amazing traditional Southern lunch, with jambalaya, red beans and rice, collard greens, and beignets, and then stepped into the stream of history by walking together over the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

My heart swelled with gratitude and pride to walk behind Deacon Borden, as she resolutely pushed her walker over the bridge. This 89-year-old woman has been preparing for this event for weeks, getting up early and going to the gym Mon-Thu. She embodied - mind, heart and soul - the spirit of the pilgrim.

We were not sorry to say good-bye to Selma, but we were grateful to experience the incredible generosity and hospitality of God's people that so often shines when things fall apart. Arriving in Rome, Georgia late on Sunday night, we were glad to be expected, given rooms, and a comfy bed to rest in.

I will share the story of our last two days in another note.

Shalom!  
Pastor Mary