



(Above photo courtesy of Justin Hartsell.)

MLK Day Address Captures and Fractures Interests

By: Justin Hartsell

EMORY, Va. — On Monday, Jan. 21, 2019, Emory & Henry College hosted an evening keynote address to honor the life and work of Martin Luther King Jr. The students offered mixed reviews of Reverend Kevin Vandiver, the keynote speaker.

Vandiver, a senior pastor at The Christ Center at Transfiguration in Harlem, NY, delivered an address that contrasted King’s superhuman image against his actual humanity. Vandiver explained how we imagine superheroes to be the ones to save our world, but in reality that “some heroes sometimes have to walk around without their capes.”

Vandiver spoke about how King “battled severe depression,” explaining how multiple assassination attempts worsened his depression, and how King “endured many failures”—not seeing much of what he taught come true before his assassination at 39.

The crowd was challenged by Vandiver to “begin listening and striving for a common good for each other.” He metaphorically spoke of how we all are called to have a seat at life’s table and share in community with one another.

According to E&H President Jake Schrum, the audience was the largest the college has seen for a Martin Luther King Jr. Day keynote address.

Though Vandiver strived to allude to today's social issues and empower the current E&H student body, students found themselves either connecting to the speech or found that the message got lost due to visual or auditory distractions in the gym.

Josie Salyer, a sophomore at E&H, said, "Reverend Vandiver admonished the audience not to be content with improvements that have undoubtedly been made in American society, but rather to continually welcome individuals of all races, nationalities and social groups to join at the same table."

Other students, such as E&H sophomore Laken Hill, complained that the sound in the gym was poor and the address could not be heard.

E&H freshman Tariq Gardner described how an artistic puzzle board containing student writings about civil rights displayed in front of the stage took from the speech. One piece had written on it, "Black Lives Matter," with another reading, "All Lives Matter." Gardner explained, "Yes, all lives matter, but not all lives went through the same generational oppression."

Following the address, E&H senior Kauhilil King said Vandiver "fascinated" him and explained how sitting down with a problem "empowers discussion and visibility of our humanity, which ignites change."

The college recognizes Martin Luther King Jr. Day by hosting a keynote speaker and having a variety of workshops for students throughout the day.