

BEFORE DAWN

*--For the 53rd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration, 2026
City of Alexandria, Virginia, Thursday, January 15, 2026*

These days, every day feels like the shroud
before dawn. Slowed by the January cold,
I sense in the air that we are between
days of triumph, when justice, even momentarily,
prevails.

In the shadow before morning, we cling to the words
that have been placed gently, but with deep intention
in our hands, so that we will have strength to rise again
and fight.

Dr. King—he left us more than words
to live by—he left us words to hope by, to cry by,
and to crouch by in the mystery
before dawn.

Yes, he told us that hope is infinite, while our disappointment
would be finite. He told us that moving forward,
at any possible pace, would always be necessary.
But the words

I hear in whispers before dawn, on these days of mourning,
are, “I may not get there with you” “I may not get there
with you,” because those are the words that placed
this righteous duty at our feet.

Before dawn, we scramble together our friends and every tool
we own. We speak sacred words to each other, the ones that will ready
our spirits and spur us on to continue. Even before the day
breaks, we are ready. Even before the dawn, we have not lost our hope.

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