

Walk in Love:

Recalling the Untold Story of Our Brother in Christ, Atty. Z. Alexander Looby

Written by Natasha Deane

What most people don't know about Atty. Z. Alexander Looby, was that he was an Episcopalian. Some are aware that Looby and his family narrowly escaped death when their Nashville home was bombed by white supremacists on April 19th, 1960. That is the day our city recognizes Diane Nash, C.T. Vivian, John Lewis and thousands of members of Nashville's Black communities for their peaceful march to the Public Square to confront then Mayor Ben West in protest of the city's treatment of their communities. They don't teach about the reasons that the community marched.

Who Was Z. Alexander Looby?

Z. Alexander Looby was a lead attorney in the de-segregation of public schools across the state of Tennessee. Looby was also a principle lawyer for the Non-Violent Student Movement in Nashville in the late 1950s. While students planned and conducted sit-ins at downtown Nashville lunch counters, it was Looby who defended them after their arrest. Before that, Looby was an Episcopalian from the British West Indies, faithfully attending Holy Trinity Church in Nashville.

In the midst of the struggle for justice that characterized his mature life, Looby donated a plot of land adjacent to his home on Meharry Blvd. to the Diocese of Tennessee to be used to erect a chapel for area students. It was in that chapel that Looby and his wife would hide on April 19th, 1960, when his home was bombed in an act of cowardly terror. The chapel on that land is now known as St. Anselm's Episcopal Church. St. Anselm's is the only predominantly African-American parish in the Diocese of Tennessee today.



Looby in court

Along with Thurgood Marshall (our nation's first African-American U.S. Supreme Court Justice), Looby was a principle lawyer defending African-Americans who were arrested and tried following the deadly 1946 "Mink Slide" race riot in Columbia, Tennessee (a riot instigated by an attempted lynching). It was Looby who rescued his colleague at the banks of the Duck river where Marshall was forcibly taken to be lynched following his successful defense of those who had been accused in that trial, held in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. At a 2017 dedication service, I witnessed the unveiling of the mural "Justice Served", by Summertown artist Bernice Davidson, at the Lawrence County Courthouse. The mural depicts Marshall defending African-Americans

accused of instigating a riot in that trial, and the unveiling was attended not only by city officials and family of the defendants, but by our own Bill Gittens, my West Indies Brother-in-Christ from St. Anselm's Church, representing Looby, Marshall and the common thread of Episcopal tradition through the Islands cum Nashville.



Looby testifies regarding the bombing of his home

And so it was that a few of us became involved in the remembrance of our brave Episcopal brother, who gave so much to the city of Nashville by his faith and action, only to be rewarded with a bomb and a vaguely regarded historical oblivion.

Remembering Alexander Looby: The "Walk In Love"

Led by Chaplain Mary Murphy of the Center for Contemplative Justice and others from the community, we recognize the life of Z. Alexander Looby in an annual interfaith commemorative prayer walk. The "Walk in Love" is a 2.2 mile walk beginning at St. Anselm's church, leading up Jefferson Street, through the middle of the Bicentennial Mall, up the hill past the "Witness Walls" at the Courthouse and ending in the Public Square.

Since the original "Walk" of 15 or so participants, the event has grown to about 50. It now commences at Tennessee State University, stops briefly and joining with others at St. Anselm's as dictates historical record, and continues on to the courthouse steps. Many have supported the march in the past. It is our prayer that many will again participate as we witness to the city our high regard for our brother in Christ, Atty. Z. Alexander Looby, remembering his full story, not just the parts that give us comfort.

As it happens, this year April 19th falls on Good Friday. Since many of the clergy who assist with the walk and prayers conduct services that day, the "Walk in Love" will be held on Saturday, April 20th, at 2pm. We pray that you will join us. If you have questions or would like to make a financial contribution please contact walkinlove2019@gmail.com. Contributions go to educational efforts and outreach, including t-shirts for youth groups and students at TSU and Fisk who participate.