Jameel McGee (left) and Andrew Collins share their story of betrayal, anger, and forgiveness during Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapel in PMC January 19. (Photo by Heidi Ramirez)

By: Konner Dent

“February 8, 2006, was the day that forever changed my life.”

“All I wanted was to go to the store and get milk for my son.”

This is how this year’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapel began, with the stories of Jameel McGee and Andrew Collins: A man sentenced to a decade in prison and the man who lied to make it happen. However, the message delivered wasn’t one of conviction, but of reconciliation, because now, Jameel and Andrew tour the country as both public speakers and friends.
On that fateful day in 2006, McGee headed to the store in the wrong car: He caught a ride with individuals who had drugs in their vehicle. When Collins, then a police officer in Benton Harbor, ten miles from the Andrews campus, arrived on the scene, he arrested McGee as the carrier, despite opposition and pleas of “not guilty.” A trial and conviction later, bitterness fueled McGee’s time in prison, as he began a 10-year sentence for a crime he didn’t commit.

“I read the first five verses of Genesis and I was overwhelmed with this strong feeling of, ‘let it go.’ And this was before Frozen came out!” joked McGee as he told his story during Chapel in PMC. “After wrestling with God over the situation, I concluded that while I didn’t have a choice in my arrest, I could decide how to respond to my situation.”

Gradually, McGee began breaking out of his shell of anger apathy.

Meanwhile, power and arrogance were catching up with Collins, and two years later, he came under scrutiny for drug involvement. Unlike in McGee’s case, the facts were not altered, and with the prospect of jail looming overhead, Collins confessed all the arrests he had falsified, including Jameel McGee’s.

“The longer I was a police officer the more wrong things I did, and the more wrong things I did the less I felt bad about them,” Collins admits. “In February of 2008 I got caught with crack, heroine and marijuana in my office, and in one day my life crumbled.”

However, in the midst of the repercussions of his decisions, Collins also experienced a spiritual revelation, and when he came clean about the falsified arrests he’d made, McGee was released, having served four years, and Collins went in for one.

This is where their stories start to become even more entwined. The two accidentally met at park one day and then, in 2015, they both ended up working at the same restaurant in Benton Harbor. One year later, they had talked, forgiveness had been granted, and the two had become friends.

After their story was featured on NBC’s “On The Road with Steve Hartman,” the innocent convict and corrupt cop had not only become friends, but also public speakers.

“I’m white, and he’s black. We get this,” Collins reflected. “We get that this could speak to our nation right now, and we don’t have all the answers, but we have a piece of it. The piece we are holding on to right now is reconciliation.”

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