

Remembering Injustice, Working For Justice

Remembering the Emanuel Nine

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2 Corinthians 5:17-20

¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

There is an age-old adage, "Time heals all wounds." While it is true that pain and grief may lessen with time, the passing of time does not erase painful memories. And so it is that a two-year period of time has passed since we experienced one dreadful event of the Emanuel Nine lives lost in the city of Charleston; perhaps the darkest of hours ever conceived in most of our lives. With heartfelt sympathy and prayers for the families of the slain victims and the congregation, "Mother" Emanuel AME, we strive to live in consolation, not in despair, but with hope, as we remember our dearly departed, beloved sisters and brothers.

We have mourned these losses, and we mourn still, because of sin-brokenness; but we mourn not as the world mourns. As believers/Christians, we mourn with the blessed hope that earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. Though this dreadful event will be forever ingrained in our minds, we remain in a process of healing, as our God is a sustaining God.

No matter how grim or bleak our circumstances, we are yet sustained by a sovereign God. God comforts and God sustains us in times like this with the blessed gift of reconciliation. The Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5, [God has] "reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). Paul goes on to say, God has entrusted "the message of reconciliation" to us; the people of God; the Church. Now this particular passage of scripture of our being reconciled, having the ministry and the message of reconciliation has a nice ring to it; it sounds really good to the ear; as well it should. It is the Word of God. It's good news!

The root word of reconciliation; *reconcile* is defined; "to re-establish friendship between; to settle or resolve, as a dispute; to bring (oneself) to accept; To make compatible or consistent." In a sense, we have witnessed a reconciling by family members of the Emanuel Nine expressing forgiveness and compassion for the assassin. In essence, reconciling is "working it out" for the good of all; to make right. That we have been reconciled to God through Christ is evident. Look, we exist as the Church; and the Cross is a reminder. But the question is: "As the church of God in Christ, are we living out this ministry of reconciliation?" Are we carrying this message of reconciliation entrusted to us by God? In responding to how the dreadful Charleston event may have changed the way we feel about race and the Church; how we might become one, I assert that if ever there was need of reconciliation in, through, and by the Church, the time is NOW, and has already come. The time has surely come for us to move beyond the sins of segregation and separatism as "White church," "Black Church," "Latino Church" and so on; which is the very reason the late Dr. MLK, Jr. addressed the reality that "the most segregated hour/time of our seven-day week is 11:00 AM on Sunday." So it was then back in Dr. King's lifetime, and so it is still in existence today. Yet our segregated churches consist of a body of believers/Christians to whom God has given the ministry of reconciliation. Both segregation and separatism are contrary to reconciliation.

Thus, we are compelled to become proactive in living out the ministry of reconciliation; which is summed up in love and forgiveness; repentance and acceptance of the would-be "outsiders;" in looking beyond racial diversities and truly becoming the one Church that God called us to be.

I am proud to be a part of what God has been and is doing in the churches in our Synod, particularly beginning with Ascension Lutheran Church, of which I am pastor. Every Sunday I witness an end to segregation within the church. No visitor is made to feel like an outsider there. Visitors, regardless of race, are warmly embraced by our members; and it keeps them coming back, frequently. This is a great start.

While it is such that in our world, outbreaks of tragedy tend to bring all people together, regardless of race, creed, color, religion or sexual orientation; in aid and support of one another; times of tragedy should not be the driving force for the Church to become unified. Henceforth, we, the people of God; the one Church, ambassadors for Christ, exist as the Body of Christ and we are called to show forth the love of God through Christ in a dark, sin-broken world.

I conclude with the words of a hymn, I learned when I sang on the seminary choir at Southern Seminary. I often reference it in my various sermons, as it speaks directly to every believer. It is titled, "Christ Has No Body" (and when I share it I usually sing it).

"Christ has no body now but yours, Christ has no body now but yours.
Yours are the mouth with which He talks; yours are the feet with which He walks; yours are the hands
with which He touches all the world.
Yours are the ears, yours are the eyes.
Christ has no body now but yours."

My sisters and my brothers, the Church is a living organism, for we are the Body of Christ seen in the world. In remembrance of the Emanuel Nine, we live in the light of our belief in the resurrection. Until that blessed day of hope, may each of the nine souls rest in peace and may there be peace here among us. Amen!