



Resurrection Power

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“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, . . . It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and

becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, . . .”

Mark 4:26-34, NRSV

There are moments in our lives when perception and revelation bring on a greater awareness of what really matters. They synchronize the human heart to the astonishing grace of God’s better way life and of a light the world’s darkness cannot extinguish.

It is interesting that Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a seemingly insignificant task of scattering seed, as small as mustard seeds, on the ground. The world’s culture, drowning in its own blunderings and insensitivities, politically, institutionally, intellectually, and religiously, often appear far greater than a preacher from “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” scattering the seed of Good News God had given Him. Yet, what He scattered continues to fill human lives with faith, hope and anticipation. Through his tremendous life and death, Christ helps us to see how life triumphs over death, how right wins over wrong, and how justice prevails over injustice. As the song affirms, “Lord, it’s in your hands.”

This was affirmed on the Wednesday evening of June 17, 2015, when a disturbed young man, sitting during prayer service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, took out a gun and started shooting. When the shooting stopped and the gun smoke cleared, nine people were murdered, including the pastor. More interesting was how this diabolical and evil act of hatred against another race of human beings brought the Kingdom of GOD closer to us. It moved the Kingdom, as Joel C. Gregory has said, “from insignificance to dominance.”

God took those nine lives and scattered them like a seed upon the consciousness of a nation fed up with violence and guns. In his infinite mercy, God invisibly produced a harvest. We are yet to recover from the sight of worshippers and other Charlestonians gathering across the street from Mother Emanuel embracing one another: praying and singing. Moving from the dark night of that bloody and murderous scene thousands, understanding the people of God to be the continuation of the Incarnation, the image of God’s glory, and the salt and light of the world, stood on the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge that crosses the Cooper River. Permeating the warmth and radiance of the love of God, they joined hands in unity as an expression of their sorrow and their faith.

Almost a week and a half later, the late Reverend Dr. John H. Gillison was on program to give a brief history of Mother Emanuel (Vice President Joe Biden was in attendance). Referencing the tragedy, Dr. Gillison, who served as the Presiding Elder of the Edisto District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and was a former pastor of Emanuel, said: “We are a people who know how to go from pain to power. . . We have resurrection blood in us. . . We will rise again.”

What caused us to stagger even more was how the families of those nine murdered victims forgave the murderer. That forgiveness ignited something that made Governor Nikki Haley proud to say “it’s a great day in South Carolina.” Our then governor signed a bill for the Confederate flag to be removed from the grounds of the State House.

Only as we open ourselves up to the profound and powerful moment of God’s grace can lives be filled with new life. From the senselessness of that tragedy, the kingdom of God came closer and the visibility of its significance showed all of God’s children coming together in preparation and celebration of life, not death. God used this tragedy to lovingly move us beyond merely mourning the passing of those nine murdered victims, to seeing how God exalts humanity’s greatness. God revealed to all that the cause for a better way of life and a new humanity are very much alive. Jesus’ parable parallels to an allegory of Ezekiel’s where God says to the prophet:

I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.
On the mountain height of Israel
I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest
winged creatures of every kind.
All the trees of the field shall know
that I am the Lord.
I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree;
I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.
I the Lord have spoken;
I will accomplish it.
Ezekiel 17:22-24, NRSV

In spite of man’s philosophies, ideologies, and priorities, the psalmist declares, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” –Psalm 24 1, NRSV.

The seemingly insignificance of a seed scattered erupted into an act of empowerment that touched deep within the heart and soul of humanity where people truly live. If Americans are to ever broaden their sense of nationalism and enflame their spirit of patriotism, it will not be because we respect our flag asking, "Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?" Rather, it will be when we revere our God, who is greater and bigger than "stars and stripes," as we shout together: "For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."