



## **A Resource for Clergy and Worship Planners**

**The Racial Justice and Healing Workgroup of the South Carolina Christian Action Council** offers these worship resources for a concert of confessional and healing worship services to be used on the Council's **Racial Justice Sunday**. This year this annual concert of worship falls on **June 17, 2018**—the **3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the “Mother” Emanuel killings** in the **50<sup>th</sup> commemorative year of the Orangeburg Massacre** (February 8, 1969).

These resources take the form of **commentary** on the readings of the Common Lectionary for Sunday, June 17, 2018, **sample prayers, sermons**, and a snapshot of **racial disparities in one county in South Carolina**.

**You are invited to use these resources to shape your Racial Justice Sunday** Worship on June 17, 2018, or any day that serves your congregation better. Following the Lectionary is not required, you might utilize the commentary on one or two of the three Scripture passages. Adapt and adjust resources as best serves your needs.

Regardless of how you take advantage of these resources, we thank you for addressing **the importance of Remembering Injustice and the challenge of Working for Justice** in the lives of individuals, congregations, our state, our nation, and our world.

Racial Justice and Healing Workgroup 2017-2018  
South Carolina Christian Action Council

SCCAC Racial Justice art, this printed booklet, and resources posted on-line were made possible by a **Missions Grant from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of South Carolina**

## COMMENTARY

Revised Common Lectionary Texts for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 17, 2018

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### Introduction

Every generation has its Ground Zero. Perhaps now, it is every half generation. The term “Ground Zero” is a malevolent by-product of our newfound ability to kill the world. It refers, scientifically, to the point directly above, below, or at which a nuclear explosion occurs. Less scientifically, and less deadly, it can also mean the center or origin of rapid or violent activity or change. The Twin Towers were Ground Zero of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The Holocaust had its Ground Zero, physically, spiritually and theologically. So did the Babylonian Exile that was the historical context for Ezekiel’s preaching. So was the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., a game changer for both Judaism and the first Christians.

Locally and recently for those of us in South Carolina, the massacres in Orangeburg and Charleston have been more Ground Zero moments. Every generation has its landscape-changing Ground Zero events. We all have wounds that will not heal, that bleed afresh when too roughly touched.

Into this human condition, scripture speaks. The following three scripture texts were not chosen specifically for this Racial Justice Sunday when we are remembering injustice and working for justice. These are the scriptures assigned for this Sunday in June by the *Revised Common Lectionary* used as a worship resource by many denominations and congregations. Instead of a context in search of a scripture text, we let the text speak its word to our context. The Spirit speaks to us the word we need to hear at the moment we give ourselves to listen to its voice. The words of scripture don’t change, but they do interpret the time and place where they are heard. Now we allow these scriptures to interpret our Ground Zeros, our concerns about race, justice, and injustice; and to renew our hearts within us.

### Commentary on [Ezekiel 17:22-24](#)

Ezekiel lived in Babylon in the 6<sup>th</sup> C BCE and was an active prophet before and after the Ground Zero of the beloved Temple’s destruction in 596. The first twenty-four chapters of his collection of sermons speak of judgment against Israel and Jerusalem. His preaching during this time focused on the holy opinion that their military defeat was the result of divine judgment.

Chapter 17 is a sustained political allegory. The cedar tree represents the Davidic monarchy that appears to have been felled and crushed under the rubble of Jerusalem. But God is not crushed under the rubble. God promises re-growth and new life.

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In this allegory is not knowledge, but mystery. Here is not predictability, but unpredictability. We are asked and invited to commit to a hope beyond our already dashed hopes. The prophetic words of Ezekiel are preached to beaten down and beaten up exiles. How often do we feel like exiles from justice, equality, and reconciliation? Exile is not always geographical, but is nearly always spiritual.

Hope is preached to the long-ago exiles declaring God will do something they cannot see in the present nor imagine in the future. Confidence that this is sure, even when all evidence is to the contrary, is the very definition of faith.

### **Commentary on [2 Corinthians 5:6-10 \[11-13\] 14-17](#)**

We know we are overhearing conversation between the apostle Paul and the congregation in Corinth, Greece. They had their theological and practical issues to work out. But this is also our conversation with scripture. And here we find so many cross-stitchable phrases to encourage us on. Lift them out and let them lift you up!

Paul has encouraged the Christian community for nearly 2,000 years now to walk by faith and not by sight. We need to hear that because we've seen a lot of things and we can't un-see them. We need to put on the eyeglasses of faith not to obscure the injustices, the bodies, or the hate; but to see the crucified Christ standing at every Ground Zero with justice in one nail-scarred hand and healing in the other.

He writes so boldly that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (v. 17) But the "new creation" can be hard to discern when it seems as if nothing really changes under the sun. We shout, "never again" and then there's another school shooting, another lynching of someone's soul. Humanity is never really changed by knowing its history or by knowing the facts. The lessons of the past nor the data on the ground are capable of saving us or transforming us. It sure seems that they would create in us new hearts, but alas, they do not. Surely, we don't need one more Ground Zero to prove it to us.

For Paul, the new creation community, one transformed by Christ, means we are reshaped from self-centeredness to mutual concern, means that we aren't just familiar with our history and experiences, but also the history and experiences of others. A transformed life means we stay strong in our hope even when all the evidence tempts us to despair. This is a life that cannot be lived in isolation anymore than a finger of the body can decide to go it alone. But because we are always tempted toward isolation, suspicion, and tribalism of all sorts; this new creation is not birthed without a prolonged labor all through the night.

### **Commentary on [Mark 4:26-34](#)**

A first read of these parables about seeds assumes we are being encouraged with the obvious, yet remarkable, truth that tiny things have wondrous power. Indeed, they do. Small ideas or events can cause an avalanche of change. Our global and personal histories are full of such phenomena. The growth of an acorn into a mighty oak tree is a mystery that still surprises us. Often, we interpret the parable of the mustard seed as if it were a parable of the acorn. But it is not.

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Mustard seeds don't grow into massive trees. They actually grow into scraggly annual plants. So, the image of the mustard seed is used ironically, just as the cross is ironically a tree of life. The tree of life is an image used by the ancient Near East as a symbol of power of the monarch. The mighty cedar tree from Ezekiel echoes this. The variety of birds coming to nest in its branches is also ironic in that such a scraggly bush could attract all the birds of the air. And yet, this is our claim of the cross. This cruciform tree of life spreads its arms wide to embrace the whole world. The Ground Zero of Golgotha becomes the Ground Zero of Grace.

### **PRAYERS**

#### **A PRAYER**

O God of Jesus Christ,  
We remember...  
the Middle Passage's brutal transfer to Gadsden's Wharf,  
the human beings become chattel on the auctioneer's block,  
the overseer's whip and the backbreaking work,  
a war to break the chains and an Exodus with hope of a promised land,  
the promise of freedom stolen by Jim Crow,  
the lynchings, marches, and crosses that made a mockery of faith in your Son,  
monuments to a lost cause,  
the fire hoses, jails, dogs, and beatings of resistance,  
the mowing down of youth at South Carolina State University,  
the hatred that shattered welcome at Mother Emanuel.  
We remember the injustices of the past,  
and we know that these injustices are still with us  
in the poverty, the incarceration, the disparities of education, jobs, and income  
that have caused people of color in South Carolina to remain behind.  
In our remembering, O God,  
may Jesus Christ,  
who suffered the injustice of torture and lynching because of his stand for the good of others,  
be our guiding star  
to help us resolve to work for justice in our state  
and to heal the wounds of racism that afflict us so deeply.  
For from his death and resurrection, we draw the hope that injustice, sin, and even death  
are not ultimate.  
For you, our God, are a God of life, of life to the full for all your creation,  
and we claim our trust that if we are faithful to the ways of your kingdom,  
you will allow its justice to break forth into our times and in our state.  
We ask this through Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

--by Father Alexander "Sandy" McDonald, Pastor, St. John Neumann Catholic Church, Columbia

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### **A RESPONSIVE PRAYER**

(A leader proclaims each petition with response by the assembly)

Leader: That the Holy Spirit will move the hearts of the followers of Jesus to engage more deeply the problems of racial injustice in our state...

**All: Give us the mind of Christ.**

Leader: May leaders at every level of government in South Carolina be graced with a spirit of concern for the welfare and good of all citizens...

**All: Grant them wisdom, courage, and compassion.**

Leader: May all who teach, mentor, and counsel young people in South Carolina receive the support they need...

**All: May they persevere in their vocation to serve.**

Leader: That the wounds of racial injustice left unhealed—the wounds of slavery, discrimination, lynching, disenfranchisement, segregation, poverty, profiling, and incarceration—that these wounds might be touched with the balm of honesty, conciliation, and restorative justice...

**All: Make us instruments of peace and reconciliation.**

Leader: That those who suffer because they are doing what is right on behalf of the poor and oppressed be given strength and hope...

**All: Make their voices strong.**

Leader: May the deaths of those killed in the Orangeburg Massacre and in the Massacre of the Emanuel Nine and the deaths all who have died as a result of racial hatred in the course of our state's history move our society away from all violence...

**All: May they rest in the fullness of God's Kingdom.**

### **A BENEDICTION**

May God give you passion for the cause of justice,  
May God's peace dwell within you to give you strength,  
May God bring forth abundant fruit from the work you do for justice,  
And may God bless you and keep you in his care now and forever. Amen.

**SERMONS**

***RESURRECTION POWER***

by The Reverend Dr. James Blassingame, President  
Baptist Educational and Missionary Baptist Convention, South Carolina  
Pastor, Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Sumter, South Carolina

“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

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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

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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."

### ***FOLLOW JESUS***

Text: Luke 4:14-21

By Reverend Dr. Joseph Darby

Racial Justice Sunday is an excellent time to focus on the ministry and mission of Jesus the Christ, to recommit to following not just Jesus the Lamb of God, but Jesus the revolutionary who shook the religious status quo of His day to its core, who offered salvation but also articulated God's love through liberation.

Luke's Gospel tells us that early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus went to Sabbath worship in His hometown of Nazareth, to the synagogue where He'd grown up and was a familiar face. No one was surprised when, as was the custom in synagogue worship, He stood up to read and comment on a passage of Scripture.

No one was surprised when Jesus chose and read a Scripture they that all knew - Isaiah's prophecy of what the Messiah would someday say: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed and to say that this is the acceptable year of the Lord."

None of that initially surprised those who heard Jesus, but when He sat back down and said, "Today, in your hearing, the Scripture has been fulfilled," when they realized that He was claiming to be the Messiah, they were shocked and confused and angry. They drove Him out of the synagogue and were ready to kill Him before He simply walked away.

Jesus spent the next three years giving life to that prophecy. He carried the good news, advocated for the poor and the oppressed and reached out to those who were shunned, scorned and labeled as sinners by those who claimed to have "good" religion. His work set the stage for His journey to the cross, His work so upset the religious and political leadership that they felt compelled to silence Him.

Fifty years ago, in 1968, the same thing happened to Martin King in Memphis, Tennessee; to Bobby Kennedy in Los Angeles, California; to Henry Smith, Samuel Hammond and Delano Middleton in Orangeburg, South Carolina and to other notable and little-known warriors in the fight for freedom, justice and equality. They followed Jesus by and through their lives, their work, their courage and their sacrifice, and if we are to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord in 2018, then we have to do as they did. We have to follow Jesus, because we do not live in a post-racial America, there's still work to be done.

The President of the United States gives political comfort to white supremacists and condemns what he calls radical Islamic terrorism but doesn't say a word about the hate crimes that are really radical American terrorism, there's work to be done. The United States Congress is trying to roll back the clock of civil rights progress and cares more about protecting assault rifles than about protecting the health of all children, there's work to be done.



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The political leadership in South Carolina is consumed with the rights of the “unborn” but can’t build, fund and staff good schools for all of the “already born,” there’s work to be done. Young black men can be hassled by law enforcement simply for being young black men, there’s work to be done.

The times are too critical, the need is great for us to settle for “feel good” Sunday religion. We have to roll up our sleeves, take up our crosses and get in step with the Jesus who brings real strength, who brings real joy, who brings real justice, who brings real power.

We have to go beyond what’s safe and polite and carry the good news by advocating for all of God’s children, we have to do so in the spirit of those who faced down fire hoses and police dogs 50 years ago, singing, “Before I’ll be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free,” we have to follow Jesus!

We have to follow the Jesus who changed the world for the better, the Jesus who announced His mission in Sabbath worship but who didn’t just talk the talk - he walked the walk. He had the nerve to say that the poor in spirit and the humble are actually blessed, to run those who were shaking down the poor in God’s temple out of the temple - the same people who would be payday lenders and loan sharks today - and to condemn those who made a show of their religion but didn’t practice what they preached and actually dealt in division.

Jesus knew that doing so set Him on a trajectory for the cross, He could have played it safe, but He chose to do God’s will. If we are to follow Jesus and stand against injustice today, we can’t be cowardly Christians, we have to step out on faith and do God’s will.

If that means challenging those who tell racist jokes and send racist tweets, we have to do it. If that means speaking truth to those who seek to make political hay by dividing people and passing laws meant to discriminate and disenfranchise voters, we have to do it. If that means rallying and marching and facing down bigots when we could be looking out for self, we have to do it. If that means calling out those who call themselves Christians but will support immoral and profane politicians as long as they like their politics, we have to do it.

We can’t be “light bulb” Christians who turn our religion on for Sunday worship and turn it off when we leave God’s house, we have to follow the Jesus who said, “You’re blessed when people revile you and persecute you and trash you and troll you, rejoice in all of that because God will reward you!”

When we have the nerve to come out of our comfort zones, build bridges instead of walls and make it plain that we won’t tolerate intolerance, we can follow Jesus and see laws changed, follow Jesus and see new respect for all of God’s children, follow Jesus and drive bigotry back into the shadows.

We can do so knowing that we don’t have to fight alone, for the God we serve will be there to bless us, be there to make a way for us, be there to bear our burdens, be there to fight our battles, be there to remind us why one hymn writer said, “I hear the voice of Jesus telling me still to fight on, He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone!”

We have to follow the Jesus who changed the world for the better, the Jesus whose grace and power prompted The Apostle Paul to tell Roman Christians who would soon be persecuted, “Don’t be defeated by evil, defeat evil with good.”

Jesus did His work knowing that he would be, as Isaiah prophesied, “despised and rejected,” but He did the right thing anyway, completed His work on the cross anyway, prayed

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for the crowds that cursed Him and told a criminal crucified with Him, "You'll be in paradise with me today." Jesus had the determination to stand up and serve God anyway.

If we are to follow Jesus today, then we need that same determination - the determination that took Martin King to Memphis, knowing that he might be in danger and that allowed South Carolina State University students to stand up for their rights in the face of heavily armed State patrolmen.

That's not easy, because when you try to serve the Lord and stand up for justice and righteousness, someone won't like it and will criticize and even threaten you; but stand up anyhow. If you're a person of color, they'll call you an agitator trying to stir up trouble who ought to go back where you can from - even in your hometown - but stand up anyhow. If you're white, they'll call you a crazy, left wing do-gooder looking for trouble who ought to sit down and shut up, but you've got to stand up anyhow.

If you work to bring people together for honest conversations, if you fight for victims of injustice and stand against overt and casual racism, if you simply acknowledge that the battle for civil rights is still being fought, you'll be messed with, cursed out, derided and dismissed, but you have to have the determination of the Jesus who said, "I must work the works of God who sent me" and do the right thing anyhow, saying with my spiritual ancestors, "Talk about me as much as you please, the more you talk I'm gonna bend my knees!"

When you make up your mind to serve the Lord and that nothing and no one will turn you around, you can follow Jesus and change the conversation about race and justice, follow Jesus and call people to conscience - outside and inside of the church. You can follow Jesus - not only on Sundays, but at home, at work, at school and in the halls of government and the voting booth, follow Jesus and let God use you to let justice and righteousness flow freely.

You may not be praised by people down here, but God will see and make a way for you, God will see and open doors for you, God will see and renew your strength, God will see and restore your hope. God will use you to change lives, to change the church, to change your community to make America "One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice" - not for some, but "for all" and enable you to find assurance in the words of the hymn that says, "If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living will not be in vain.

There's still work to be done. Being black in America still makes it hard to get a good job, to get a mortgage to buy a good house or to walk through some neighborhoods without someone calling 9-1-1, there's still work to be done.

Drive down very white I-85 in South Carolina and you'll find a booming economy and good schools. Drive down very black I-95 in South Carolina and you'll find impoverished communities and schools that can barely make it, there's still work to be done.

America is still very separate and unequal, we've come a long way in the last fifty years, but we still have a long way to go. There's still work to be done; and if we are, as the Bible says, to love others as we love ourselves, we have to do that work. We have to do it, as the writer to the Hebrews said, "...looking to the Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith."

Follow Jesus. It may take some time and cost you a few friends but follow Jesus. You may be trolled and criticized and ridiculed but follow Jesus. Do so in the spirit of a contemporary gospel song of my faith tradition that says, "Nobody told me that the road would be easy, but I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me."

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Follow Jesus. Make a difference. Speak truth to power. Don't just talk about your religion – live your religion and work for truth and justice and righteousness.

You'll be glad you did, because when you follow Jesus, He'll protect you and sustain you and lead you to new hope, lead you to new determination, lead you to new peace of mind, lead you to new possibilities and enable you to testify, as did the writer of a beloved hymn that those in the African Methodist Episcopal Church traditionally sing on Easter Sunday, "He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own, and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known!"

### ***EMANUEL NINE ANNIVERSARY SERMON***

The Rt. Rev Andrew Waldo, Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina

"There are no shortcuts to maturity."

In a world that demands sound bites instead of nuance, saying that "there are no shortcuts to maturity" goes against the grain. It resists the pressure that surrounds us to choose sides quickly, to be perfectly consistent in every principle or belief. On/off, black/white, yes/no seem to be the kinds of answers urgently demanded of today's leaders by the various media and power brokers.

The truth is, that when it comes to life in Christ—to our life as disciples—there are no shortcuts ... things take time. The good news is that along the way there are many glimpses of growth in Christian knowledge, character and action. Indeed, the past few years have given us some powerful glimpses of Christian maturity.

Floods ravaged the midlands and low country of SC in 2015, and people by the thousands set aside the busy-ness of their own lives to offer help wherever it was needed. Some whose homes were destroyed accepted their new normal, trusting that God would be with them, as scripture tells us. Both action and trust can be important signs of Christian maturity. And Christians in significant numbers have been on both the giving and receiving ends of discipleship in action these past three years. The plethora of hurricanes in 2017 has brought people together, trusting in God and each other. Even witnessing sacrificial faithfulness teaches us important things, and helps us deepen our growth and maturity as disciples. We have many among us for whom to be grateful.

But it still takes time for us to integrate lessons learned into our own Christian discipleship, something that will be true throughout our lives.

The families of the nine Charleston Christians—shot to death while in Bible study on June 17, 2015—gave us an astonishing glimpse of sacrificial faithfulness when they confronted the shooter in court, —and forgave him. Their rejection of the need for retribution and their ability to forgive came from deep and long-formed discipleship; and the power of their act resounded throughout the world. Here in South Carolina, the shooting at Mother Emanuel called us to confront the patterns or practice of racial hatred that fed Dylann Roof's violence. It called us to new depths of self-examination, repentance and reconciliation. Each of us found ourselves

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asking some form of the question, “Could I have forgiven Dylann Roof if he had shot my child, my grandmother, my brother, my father, my sister, my friend?”

In 2016, during a dialogue filmed by SCETV for its documentary, *A Seat at the Table*, one African-American woman expressed her disbelief that these families could really forgive so soon after the shooting, that they must have done so out of their shock and numbness. After all, they had not yet gone through all the stages of grief, she said. In response, the Rev. Joe Darby, who was at the time the Presiding Elder of the AME Church, Beaufort District, said something to this effect: “They forgave the shooter because forgiveness is at the heart of their Christian faith and discipleship. Their forgiveness was a result of their faith and discipleship.”

—For the rest of us, it was a glimpse of transcendently mature Christian discipleship.

There is a long Christian history of saints and ordinary disciples who have so trusted the message that in Christ, “death no longer has dominion” (Romans 6:9), that some, gladly gave their lives for Jesus’ sake and the sake of the Gospel. Such disciples know that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:39). They know that God’s love empowers us to confront the evils of this world truly without fear. This is the kind of glimpse we got from those at “Mother” Emanuel AME Church who welcomed a stranger with a different skin color into their Bible study, and from their families who would later forgive that stranger for his unspeakable act of hatred and violence.

This is the kind of discipleship that grows over time in hearts focused on love and in minds formed by gratitude.

Ignatius of Antioch (whose feast day is in October) was martyred in the early 2nd century. He was one of the five Apostolic Fathers and was said to have been a disciple of John the Apostle and Evangelist. The Episcopal Church’s book of remembrances, known as *Holy Women, Holy Men*, tells us that Ignatius

had a profound sense of two ends—his own [life’s end], and the consummation of history in Jesus Christ. In ecstasy, he saw his impending martyrdom as the fitting conclusion to a long episcopate. He was accounted the second Bishop of Antioch in Syria.

Seven authentic letters which Ignatius wrote to Churches while he journeyed across Asia Minor in the custody of ten soldiers ... give valuable insights into the life of the early Church.

Ignatius maintained that the Church’s unity would always spring from that liturgy by which all are initiated into Christ through Baptism. He exhorted: “Try to gather more frequently to celebrate God’s Eucharist and to praise him ... At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality ... “

During the Emperor Domitian’s persecution of Christians, Ignatius, as bishop and leader of the fledgling, but growing church in Antioch, was ultimately taken into custody by Roman soldiers and transported to Rome where he was martyred in the Flavian Amphitheater by wild beasts. During this journey, Ignatius wrote his *Letter to the Romans*, in which he reflects on his impending martyrdom with a deep peacefulness and joy about what he will go through in

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witness to Christ. He looks so eagerly toward his eternal union with Christ that he even discourages his Christian brothers and sisters in Rome from trying to prevent his martyrdom. He is the earliest known writer to use the word “catholic” in reference to the church as “universal.” And he’s the one we’re remembering when we “sing a song of the saints of God:”

—And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,  
And one was slain by a fierce wild beast;  
And there’s not any reason, no, not the least,  
Why I shouldn’t be one too.

These glimpses of mature discipleship are at once very different and very similar. The Charleston martyrs were accounted by Dylann Roof “as sheep to be slaughtered.” The power of their witness was in their undefended hearts, their open welcome to the unknown. The power of their families’ forgiveness was in its astonishing trust in God’s love above human inclinations to blame and for vengeance. The power of Ignatius’ martyrdom was in his foreknowledge that by his willingness to die for Jesus’ sake, the authority of Roman power and might would be diminished. In every glimpse, we discover individuals unruled by fear.

The question they lay at our feet is therefore more like, “How can I so walk the way of Christ that all fear within is banished, that at any moment in any circumstance, I can truly ‘come with joy to meet my Lord?’” “How can I first ‘die’ to fear and then keep myself from ever again falling back again in slavery to that same fear?”

In the SCETV studios, that’s what the Rev. Joe Darby was saying about the families of the Charleston Martyrs. He described their forgiveness as an offering by individuals so transformed by the love of God in Christ Jesus, that fear or retribution could have no place in their hearts.

—So what, then, is our call in the presence of this martyrdom and the astonishing act of forgiveness offered by those it most closely affected?

The SC Bishops Public Education Initiative, an ecumenical effort of the Fellowship of SC Bishops advocates for children from SC’s most impoverished families. It also asks Christians like us to consider committing ourselves as individuals to an extended period of tutoring and mentoring children in a public school. It’s not difficult to imagine the hesitation in the hearts of many people about this. “I don’t know how to tutor. I don’t know that neighborhood or those teachers or those children. People who live in the inner city or in poor, rural areas scare me. I don’t know those people. I don’t feel safe there.” The truth is, we must never choose to isolate ourselves from poverty.

Since the Charleston massacre, the Public Education Initiative has taken on broader dimensions. Which means that putting faith before our fears has a new and persistent urgency. South Carolina’s public education deficits most overwhelmingly affect the state’s African-American population. They cast thousands of citizens of color out of the running to improve their economic opportunities. It’s hard to say whether education solutions are more about race or about economics. It is most certainly about justice. But the Charleston shootings have highlighted the racial dimensions in many aspects of our common life. Considering the depth, breadth and intensity of the history of race relations in America, the word “reconciliation” implies vast and complicated work.

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—A few of you have lived your whole life attending one church. Most of you have attended several, and virtually all of us have visited many. The fundamental question that pretty much any visitor or newcomer has when attending a church for the first time is this: Can I, do I, will I belong here? We ask it because the need to belong lies at the root of human nature, and we feel it in every arena of our lives—in church, at home, at work and in our play.

To belong is to have an honored name, home, and relationship. It is to be known and loved for who you are. It is about knowing gracious welcome, warm fellowship and deep friendship. It is about knowing blessed comfort and unsolicited aid. Belonging is also about having mentors and teachers. It is about trust in goodwill and fairness, shared in common among the many. And it is embedded in our faith: as St. Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome only a 50 or so years before Ignatius did, “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption.” (Romans 8:23) Our inward groaning is for God. It is about belonging.

And yet, not one of us in this room, no matter who we are, has been spared the feeling of “not belonging” at some point and maybe even at many points in our lives. There is however a fundamental difference between being able to walk out of a situation in which we feel we don’t belong, and being stuck in a system that constantly tells us all the places and ways we don’t belong.

But we, here, are sisters and brothers in Christ. Whatever our differences may be, we belong together. Even the stranger belongs among us. We do ask ourselves along the way, “Can I, do I, will I belong?” The move toward Christian maturity changes that question slightly to another one: How can I, do I, will I help you to belong? Whether you are black, white, brown, gay, straight, rich, poor, of limited ability, deeply gifted, conservative, progressive, educated, or illiterate.

—How will we help others to belong?

Martyrs, like Ignatius of Antioch, teach us what it means utterly to let go of fear—large and small. But letting go of fear does not necessarily mean literally giving your life. It does mean getting out of your comfort zone. It does mean taking risks to invite, welcome, share power with, love, teach and mentor others especially those among whom you feel you don’t belong, or whom you feel don’t belong among you and “your people,” however you define them.

There are no shortcuts to Christian maturity. Discipleship is costly. “Those who love their life,” Jesus said, “will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.”

Into this discipleship, we were baptized. And together with St. Paul, Ignatius, Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Cynthia Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton, Daniel Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, and Myra Thompson, you and I are called to be witnesses. Witnesses to the saving love of God in Christ Jesus.

## **RACIAL DISPARITIES IN ONE COUNTY IN SOUTH CAROLINA**

**THE STATE OF RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CHARLESTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA 2000–2015** prepared by the College of Charleston Race and Social Justice Initiative and published in the fall of 2017. Full report: <http://rsji.cofc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-State-of-Racial-Disparities-in-Charleston-County-SC-Rev.-11-14.pdf>

### **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- There is a growing gap between high earners and low earners within Charleston County. The economic gulf between black and white residents that was present fifty years ago has not disappeared.
- Black people in Charleston County earn 60% of what their white counterparts make.
- While unemployment rates in Charleston County have declined since 2008, the black unemployment rate remains more than double the white unemployment rate.
- There are more black, and Hispanic Charleston residents living in poverty than white residents.
- Fifty-six percent of the black population has low or no access to healthy foods.
- The black population experiences greater poverty than other racial and ethnic groups in Charleston County.
- Forty-two percent of black children under age 18 are living below the poverty line, compared to 11% of white children.
- Several law enforcement agencies, including Charleston County Sheriff's Office and the North Charleston Police Department, have an especially egregious record of police misconduct and violence against civilians.
- The North Charleston Police Department (NCPD) employs over 340 sworn police officers who serve a population of approximately 100,000 residents. Despite the racial and ethnic diversity of North Charleston—47% of its population is African American, 11% is Hispanic, and 42% is white—the police force is overwhelmingly white at 80%. As of 2015, the City of Charleston Police Department had 400 sworn officers, of which only 83 are officers of color.
- Of more than 22,000 traffic stops in 2014 in North Charleston that did not result in a citation or arrest, 16,730 involved African Americans—almost 76% of stops, much higher than the city's black population. Most of those (10,600) involved black men.
- In 2014, black residents in North Charleston filed 60% of the citizen complaints against NCPD, though they comprise 47% of the total North Charleston population.
- White residents in North Charleston are an estimated 42% of the population and made 33% of citizen complaints against NCPD in 2014. Black North Charleston residents filed twice as many complaints against NCPD as white North Charleston residents, even though their population sizes differ by only six percentage points.
- In 2014, black Charleston County residents were booked into Charleston County jails 3.4 times as often as white Charleston County residents.
- In 2014, the black inmate population in Charleston County jails was 65%, though black residents make up only 28% of the overall county population. Conversely, that same year, white Charleston County residents were only 32% of inmates and 65% of the overall population.
- As recently as 2016, black Charleston County residents were booked into Charleston County Jail 2.3 times as often as White residents.

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- Policing reform programs such as the Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council has led to a 30% decrease in jail admissions for low-level crimes since 2013.
- White women make up the majority of teaching staff in the Charleston County Public School District. Of the district's 3,312 teachers, 2,336 (71%) are white women and 456 (14%) are white men compared to 383 (12%) black women and 72 (less than 1%) black men.
- Black students in the county graduate high school at a rate of 75% while white students graduate at a rate of 91%. This is the widest disparity between black and white students in the tri-county area.
- Black students are disproportionately stuck in low-performing, under-resourced schools. These students face more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions.
- Seven of the schools in the state with the highest percentage of students who are suspended or expelled for violent or criminal offenses in the state were in Charleston County. Of those seven schools, four were middle schools, and all were high-poverty and predominately black.
- During the 2014–15 school year, K–12 suspensions in the Charleston County School District (CCSD) totaled 8,018; black students, who make up a little more than 40% of the student population, were 6,636 (83%) of those suspensions.
- Statewide in 2014–2015, black students were more than six times as likely as their white peers to be referred to the juvenile justice system for charges of “disturbing schools.”
- Access to health care services affects health outcomes. Black people experience the greatest obstacles to health care access. A larger percentage of black Charlestonians lack health insurance or a regular source of care and are unable to afford health services.
- The black population in Charleston experiences poorer health for a wide-range of health indicators than any other racial/ ethnic groups in the region. These include greater rates of obesity, infant mortality, diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory problems, and death from numerous conditions including heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.
- Black neighborhoods in Charleston County are disproportionately exposed to unhealthy environmental conditions and have increasingly higher death rates for most cancers. These disparities can be attributed to the poor quality of their neighborhood environments. North Charleston, where African Americans primarily live, hosts numerous facilities found on the Toxics Release Inventory and greater than 50% of the block groups are occupied by people of color and individuals living below the federal poverty line.

All resources will be available and free on-line by April 27, 2018.

To support the **South Carolina Christian Action Council's** ministry of Racial Justice and Healing

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