

A storm raged in Charleston, SC this week. A storm raged but faith would not be overcome.

Let us honor the victims of the storm by naming and remembering them: “Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, a historic black church, is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the South. [It is known as Mother Emanuel] One of the shooting victims was the church's pastor and South Carolina State Sen. Clementa Pinckney. Other victims included Tywanza Sanders, Cynthia Hurd, Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, Myra Thompson, Ethel Lance, Rev. Daniel Simmons, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor and Susie Jackson.”¹

9 dead. 9 murdered in church. 9 dead because they are African-American.

And that is evil. Racism is evil. Treating someone differently because of the color of their skin and tolerating such different treatment is evil.

It is an evil so overwhelming that we want to turn away. We want to blame the shooter. We want to blame inadequate gun control laws. We want to blame and hold accountable and somehow make this horror reasonable and understandable; we want to limit this to a scale we can manage: One man. One gun. One event.

But if we turn away, if we play the blame game, if we cut this down to a size we can stand, we dishonor the dead and perpetuate the evil.

Evil is not reasonable and understandable; evil cannot be limited to a scale we can manage. Evil is evil; evil is a storm; a storm that rages beyond our control; a storm that turns the seas on which we sail into tempests of terror; a storm that whips the winds into howling furies that strip us of everything, sometimes even of life itself.

Evil is a storm, and the one thing we must not do is diminish the reality of evil. Racism does not simply lurk in the hearts of men and women. It festers in our hearts. Yes, it lurks in our institutions so that in South Carolina the flag of the United States flies at half-staff while the Confederate flag flies above it, and that is an abomination; but again, this is the temptation to limit racism to the states of the former Confederacy (and we are not former confederates) but the call to us as Christians in the aftermath of this evil is a call to look in our hearts and our society, to face this storm head on as the evil that it is and in the name of Jesus say to the storm, *Mark 4:39 (NRSV) “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.* There was peace and quiet.

Our lesson from Mark is about much more than weather phenomena. Ed Hanna could tell us how Mount Hermon which rises more than 9000 feet above sea level and is in fact a series of snowy peaks creates weather instability such that severe winds and sudden storms can change the Sea of Galilee from calm to chaotic without warning.

But to talk about the weather is to limit what Jesus does in Mark in the same way we limit evil to a scale we can manage.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/19/dylan-roof-confesses_n_7620314.html

Our lesson in Mark is an exorcism. Jesus faces evil and with a word of command, *Mark 4:39 (NRSV) “Peace! Be still!”* The Son of God casts evil out and returns creation to the peace and quiet it is meant to have, for creation is not meant for evil, creation is good.

Speaking of Jesus’ victory over evil rings hollow after a week like this; it’s hard to hear that, much less believe that, when we are in the storm; but if we let the storm shake our faith then the storm wins. If we let evil cast out our faith, the storm wins; and we are lost; and the world is lost and creation is forever defiled.

Faith in Jesus – that He is the Son of God; that He has conquered the powers of sin, evil, and death through His death on the cross and His resurrection – faith in Jesus is the only way to not only survive the storm but conquer it and in His name cast it out.

We look to Jesus and we find a surprise: *Mark 4:38 (NRSV) But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*

That is the question of this week, isn’t it? That is the question when the storm rages and we confront evil: “Jesus, don’t you care?”

But this is to misunderstand Jesus’ rest. He does not sleep because he does not care; he sleeps because he does not worry; he is not afraid; he is confident; his victory is sure – and he knows it, so he sleeps.

Faith in Jesus allows us to face the storm without fear. Faith gives us peace and quiet within so that we can create peace and quiet in creation.

Faith is creating peace and quiet in Charleston, and the faith of the saints at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is showing the way:

Reports indicate that the shooter was unrepentant, but the saints at Mother Emanuel have the faith to not let hate have the last word.

When the shooter appeared in court (remotely to protect him) to be charged with 9 counts of murder, “representatives of the victims were in the courtroom, and got to look into Roof’s eyes as they forgave him, one by one.

"I forgive you," Nadine Collier, daughter of victim Ethel Lance, said to Roof. "I will never talk to her ever again, never be able to hold her again. I forgive you and have mercy on your soul. You hurt me, you hurt a lot of people, but I forgive you."

Alana Simmons, granddaughter of victim Daniel Simmons, also spoke to the suspect.

"Hate won’t win," she said. "My grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate. Everyone’s plea for your soul is proof that they lived in love and their legacies live in love."²

² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/19/dylann-roof-family_n_7623252.html

My dear, dear shipmates, fellow travelers o'er life's seas, evil is evil. Racism is evil. It corrupts us and every dimension of American society. Resist the temptation to reduce the events in Charleston to a scale we are comfortable with. Don't take the easy way out of finding someone or something (else) to blame. Face evil with faith; the faith the saints at Mother Emanuel are clinging to this morning; the faith the saints in every African-American church in America (including our brothers and sisters at Washington Presbyterian) are clinging to for their very lives; face evil with faith!

Saint Augustine put it this way: “When you have to listen to abuse, that means you are being buffeted by the wind. When your anger is roused, you are being tossed by the waves. So when the winds blow and the waves mount high, the boat is in danger, your heart is imperiled, your heart is taking a battering. On hearing yourself insulted, you long to retaliate; but the joy of revenge brings with it another kind of misfortune – shipwreck. Why is this? Because Christ is asleep in you. What do I mean? Rouse him, then; remember him, let him keep watch within you, pay heed to him.... A temptation arises; it is the wind. It disturbs you; it is the surging of the sea. This is the moment to awaken Christ and let him remind you of those words: “Who can this be? Even the winds and the sea obey him.”” SERMONS 63.1-3 (Mark 4:41b, p. 65)

My dear, dear shipmates, evil is evil. Racism is evil, and it exists on a scale deeper and greater than we dare to admit. Face evil with faith! Don't let Jesus sleep in you. Wake him up! Have faith in him! In Jesus' name, cast evil out of your heart; and set to the task of casting racism out of our society for it has no place in God's creation! Face evil with faith; and you will hear Jesus say *Mark 4:39 (NRSV)* ***“Peace! Be still!”*** *Then the wind [will cease], and there [will be] a dead calm.* On that day, that fine day of days, there will be peace and quiet. Amen.