

Mark 5:21-43, 2015

This week all rostered leaders in the ELCA received a message from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton calling for this weekend to be a time of repentance and mourning following the tragic shootings in Charleston, S. C.

Bishop Eaton has written a letter she wants every member of our church to hear in all the congregations of the ELCA. She writes to us:

June 18, 2015

It has been a long season of disquiet in our country. From Ferguson to Baltimore, simmering racial tensions have boiled over into violence. But this ... the fatal shooting of nine African Americans in a church is a stark, raw manifestation of the sin that is racism. The church was desecrated. The people of that congregation were desecrated. The aspiration voiced in the Pledge of Allegiance that we are “one nation under God” was desecrated.

Mother Emanuel AME’s pastor, the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, was a graduate of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, as was the Rev. Daniel Simmons, associate pastor at Mother Emanuel. The suspected shooter is a member of an ELCA congregation. All of a sudden and for all of us, this is an intensely personal tragedy. One of our own is alleged to have shot and killed two who adopted us as their own.

We might say that this was an isolated act by a deeply disturbed man. But we know that is not the whole truth. It is not an isolated event. And even if the shooter was unstable, the framework upon which he built his vision of race is not. Racism is a fact in American culture. Denial and avoidance of this fact are deadly. The Rev. Mr. Pinckney leaves a wife and children. The other eight victims leave grieving families. The family of the suspected killer and two congregations are broken. When will this end?

The nine dead in Charleston are not the first innocent victims killed by violence. Our only hope rests in the innocent One, who was violently executed on Good Friday. Emmanuel, God with us, carried our grief and sorrow – the

grief and sorrow of Mother Emanuel AME church – and he was wounded for our transgressions – the deadly sin of racism.

I urge all of us to spend a day in repentance and mourning. And then we need to get to work. Each of us and all of us need to examine ourselves, our church and our communities. We need to be honest about the reality of racism within us and around us. We need to talk and we need to listen, but we also need to act. No stereotype or racial slur is justified. Speak out against inequity. Look with newly opened eyes at the many subtle and overt ways that we and our communities see people of color as being of less worth. Above all pray – for insight, for forgiveness, for courage.

Kyrie Eleison.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

This healing service had been planned and prepared for before the Bishop made her request because the lessons for today speak to the brokenness and suffering of each individual who suffers, and the suffering of all humanity.

It is true our nation, all of us were hurt to one degree or another by this horrific incident, I did not want to delay this time set aside for our healing service and thought it quite appropriate to fold these two concerns into this service today.

The impact of these killings within the walls of the church reverberate through all of humanity.

I cannot remember the last time I considered, or had to consider that a church had been “desecrated.” But that is also a part of what happened.

To be desecrated is to be violated. Emmanuel church was violated. The people of that church were violated.

The entire Christian church was violated. The sanctity of our way of life and faith was violated.

It was all desecrated.

One of the things that hurts me most we hear in Bishop Eaton’s words:

“The suspected shooter is a member of an ELCA congregation. All of a sudden and for all of us, this is an intensely personal tragedy. One of our own is alleged to have shot and killed two who adopted us as their own.”

How far can we distance ourselves from this act of violence when one of our own takes the lives of two pastors prepared for ministry by and in one of our own seminaries?

We are all in need of healing of this wound.

While the shooting in Charleston is tragic and we all need to repent and grieve that loss, each of you have your own need for healing.

It may be physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, but whatever it is you need to bring it here for God to lift that burden from your body, your mind, your soul.

You need to have the salve of God's love applied to every part of your life that causes you pain without fear that God would reject you, or deny you the relief you need.

You need to come here to give whatever it is to the Lord who created, redeemed and sustains you.

In our Gospel lesson the woman with the hemorrhage and Jairus, either by overcoming their fears or driven by them, come to Jesus for health and life and faith.

We heard last week that where there is faith there can be no fear.

Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?

Fear or no fear, what I appreciated most about the community of Emmanuel is that immediately after the shooting they didn't talk about the history of racism in our country. They didn't talk about hate.

They talked about unity and they declared that even now they would not be moved from their desire for unity among God's people of all colors.

"We will not let this divide us but unite us."

Since those words were spoken of course the media and many others have guided the discourse down another path. Something having to do with a flag.

The message of unity has been lost in the process.

We gather here today bringing our own need for healing. We pray for the healing of others and the healing of humanity.

O Lord, how long must we wait?

God's promise is certain and there will be a day when all humanity will be healed and gathered around the throne of God.

But for today you will gather around this table of Christ.

You will gather in His presence and you will be healed.

Amen