

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD AND OUR RISEN SAVIOR IN JESUS THE CHRIST, AMEN!

What memories do you have of that night five years ago when news broke of the mass shooting at Mother Emanuel? I remember disorientation first, in the wave of news that a time of prayer and bible study, had been mercilessly violated by the hatred of a white supremacist.

Then I remember my fb feed filling up with grief-filled remembrances of Pastors Clementa Pinckney and Daniel Simmons, who had touched my colleague's lives at our ELCA's Southern Seminary where they had studied together.

Over time, I'd hear more about survivors who lived to bear witness.

And those lives and legacies we lift up and give thanks for today as martyrs:¹

Myra Thompson, teacher and counselor, who had attended to that myriad of thankless tasks of church life, and had just received her license to preach;

Pastor Daniel Simmons, father, bus driver, veteran, always believing kindness wins, coaching Myra that night in leading Bible study.

Tywanza Simmonds, full of life and ambition, graduate of a historic black college, a barber, poet and lyricist, at bible study with mom and great-aunt Susie.

Susie Jackson, 87, passionate about education, the matriarch of her family and the senior group at Mother Emanuel, showing no signs of slowing down.

Cynthia Hurd, a librarian, mother; networker for family and community, at church every Monday and Wednesday since her childhood.

Ethel Lance served as sexton, seven days a week, keeping rooms tidy after visitors such as James Brown, Jimmy Carter and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Pastor Sharonda Ann Coleman-Singleton, known for being able to do it all, was also a mother, speech therapist, and coach of the girls track team.

Pastor DePayne Middleton Doctor was known as a fiery preacher, mother, an amazing alto with a heavenly voice who had just started her call.

We'd hear about Pastor Pinckney's last gifted day as a South Carolina State Senator, at budget hearings for appropriations for his underserved 45th district, before driving back to Mother Emanuel. His passions were undergirding young lives in faith for challenges ahead; lifting up their leadership. One of those young men asked if he'd stay for bible study. So Pastor Pinckney, also a father, asked his wife and daughter to get some homework done and wait for him in his office.²

We heard about a young white man who had come in and been welcomed by a bible study just like ours. About the radical hospitality they offered in Jesus' name. The hands of Pastor DePayne that

¹ See ELCA Emanuel 9 Resources, Resolutions website, for background reflections on these beautiful lives

<https://emanuelnine.epistles.faith/the-emanuel-nine/>

² <https://medium.com/matter/clementa-pinckney-s-last-day-6744ba6b23d8>

shared a bible with him. Hands raised together with his in prayer just before the shooting began. Those united in a death like Jesus', certainly are united with him in a resurrection like Jesus'.

But if all this wasn't convicting, like our own Pentecost experience of looking at Jesus' cross and our complicity, asking, "what then can we do?" there was this to indict: The news came out that this self-professed white supremacist who came to them in hate that night, had been baptized, raised and was on the membership rolls of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

And while some were cut to the heart, reviewing our records around so much normalized whiteness we'd never named racism; there was also a torrent of defensive face book posting about how, yeah, but, not OUR congregation.

At the funeral, we'd see our Presiding Bishop, the face of the whitest protestant denomination in the US, the faith-shaper of both the Rev's Pinckney and Simmons **and** their assassin. Not in her own customary white robes, but in the black academic gown of the African American tradition, a few seats away from President Obama, who offered Amazing Grace.

But the revelation that this young man so full of white rage and racial hatred was raised up in a congregation of the ELCA: was this something you remember hearing about or being asked to consider?

It was just last summer at the ELCA churchwide assembly, a day after an apology to members of African Descent for the church's silence in the face of racism, that a resolution to set June 17 aside as a Feast Day of Repentance was brought by then Chicago Pastor Kwame Pitts, along with other African American leaders.³

The first thing that happened? A white bishop stood up and said the idea was fine, but the language in it was not the language of this church for our liturgical tradition, and provisions didn't conform to our org chart. He offered an amendment for conforming to ELW protocol for Festivals & Commemorations, taking his mic time to explain the importance of the hierarchy for liturgical days.

Pastor Kwame got up to support the resolution, but against the amendment, on the basis of her mother's love for Lutheranism's rich liturgical tradition with which they'd all been raised up. But she was interrupted and told she was at the wrong mic. She needed to be at the red mic for what she wanted to say, not the green mic, but then was told, no just stay there, start over.

A young white pastor got up to affirm the words were chosen carefully and should be respected. An older African American gentleman affirmed not only the words, but the history of those who had come to the church to ask for this - that the large majority of European Descent in the assembly could never feel in their own skin --and that when we felt uncomfortable in this way, our white privilege was talking. We should allow those to say what they meant to say, and the privileged should find a way to get comfortable with that. Two more white pastors got up to defend protocols of this church the resolution writers should conform to.

You'll notice we aren't calling this a feast day.

³ ELCA 2019 Churchwide Assembly Plenary 2:11ff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0-QMI5szYU>

But nonetheless, in all of it, this IS a day of repentance – for racial violence both life-ending, and wearying by a thousand cuts, perpetrated in church and society every day against siblings of color.

It's a day of remembrance for martyrs who died in witness and service to the truly radical welcome in the Gospel of Jesus. A day we're celebrating for the first time 5 years later, which seems to be unconscionable delay -- so we're taking a minute here.

But this is also a life-giving day God seems to have delivered right on time for us – a way forward to be clearer about exactly what a life and death matter it is we're talking about, needing to do something about, in both church and society.

So it's also a day of action!

We hear the Apostle Paul's challenge... Do we want to keep on sinning so we can abuse and cheapen God's costly grace?

Well? Do we?

No! No. We don't. We don't want to keep on sinning. Our way of life is death dealing. We need to be about changing who and what we value and how we assign value. We've renounced in our baptisms into Christ's death those powers that defy God, turn us from God's loving will for us and for all creation, and from one another. In the Spirit's new life of the resurrection, we come alive to God's way, in Christ.

Today's opportunity to follow our baptismal calling to strive for justice and peace comes at a time when hearts are softened by family and eulogizes bearing witness at George Floyd's funerals, rightly reminding that at its very root, the way to reconciliation... is a reckoning.⁴ When hearts are cracked wide open by the disproportionate effects of coronavirus on communities of color, when we feel a rising up to say no to an economy of life and labor that says some lives are more disposable. When we rise up with desire for every person to have their due process.

We come to this day when members of Immanuel joined the march with the poor people's campaign and heard testimonies of the deep need to more radically welcome and preserve human life, through the reckoning of that which must change to have the reconciliation of beloved community in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. Where poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because human decency will not allow it. Where racism and all forms of discrimination and prejudice give way to love and trust triumphing over fear and hatred.

Bishop Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows of the Episcopal Diocese of Indiana wrote a powerful personal reflection on the effects of racism in her own life and on the hope and challenge today.⁵

⁴ There were a number of powerful memorial services and testimonies by George Floyd's family and other eulogizers, including, for example, Rep. Al Green and Rev. Al Sharpton in this Houston service on this theme of reconciliation, truth and reconciliation, and reckoning and reconciliation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJQbCVBeNAY>

⁵ <https://indydio.org/from-bishop-jennifer-a-reflection-of-personal-experience-hope-and-challenge-for-the-church-on-dismantling-white-supremacy-and-racism/>

I hope you'll read it in its entirety, and I hope I haven't done it injustice in my excerpting, but here are a few of the parts I wanted to lift up here:

"...We have these stories and we have not often told them outside of black and brown circles. There are experts who can better explain why, but I suspect it has something to do with the fact it is hard to tell the stories of racial trauma to the people who have the power to make things different and won't. And when we have told the stories, long before there was the internet and hashtags, we were too often told to get over it, stop playing the race card, and conform..."

So here is the challenge for the Episcopal Church: we need to stop being afraid of committing to the work of dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy. We need to learn and understand how it operates inside the Episcopal Church and in the world. As a predominately white institution rooted in the American experiment, we must be unequivocal and clear.

When I go to the webpage of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, it is clear that they are about selling ice cream -- and dismantling white supremacy. I want our church to be that clear. Our being afraid of making white people upset makes us complicit in keeping white supremacy in place. If we're not giving away our power and centering voices on the margins, then we ought not be surprised when people of color stop sharing their stories and attending our churches. ...

...Now is the time for acting. For doing the work of unlearning bias against black and brown people. Our everyday choices from where we buy groceries, to what we read, to how we adorn our sanctuaries, to where our money goes, to how we vote, all add up. It all adds up to a world where people and systems are activated to value and support all of God's children no matter what they look like or where they come from and every choice moves us a little closer to God's dream. Not just the American dream—God's dream."...

At Immanuel can we be that clear, as an anti-racist church, as clear as Ben and Jerry's, that human life in God's image is valued pricelessly? That, specifically, black lives matter and are vital in God's reign?

I think we can. I know I have work to do. And I hope that I can do some of it with you: Here at Immanuel where you seek to practice Jesus' radical welcome. Where you've done your work to be a Reconciling in Christ congregation. Where you've already learned in that process that following Jesus isn't comfortable, but life-giving.

We hear from Jesus today we need not be afraid as he sends us out with the disciples to this reckoning/reconciling work for the soul of our personal lives, our church and our nation. Jesus doesn't come to bring peace, but to make clear where the gospel stands on the side of values and dignity.

Jesus tells us when we're uncomfortable, a little afraid... that's when we know we're getting somewhere. That we won't have comfortable talks with family at the Thanksgiving table when we call out racism. Or at coffee hour when we develop an eye for and call out any idolatry of form that keeps us from seeing new things God is doing with us.

Our facebook posts about such life and death may get us in trouble with our friends. And boldly putting our zoom link on the church's page could get us zoom bombed by haters. Even our psalmist knew this way back when.

The good news is that while this work is big, and hard, and uncomfortable... it's God's work. We're not in it alone. We're part of something larger in Christ's color-wonderful body.

With its flaws we are part of a church: an ELCA that wants to do better and developed a pledge with concrete actions for racial justice (check out the link in the chat) to be anti-racist people in an anti-racist church.⁶ If you want to do something with the Poor People's Campaign, there's a whole national thing for that, a great base in Evanston, partners at Grace and St. Paul's and an Interfaith Alliance, to figure out Immanuel's piece.⁷

You have an Active Welcome presence, with Adult Spiritual Formation and Social Ministry, with Susan and Charly and others ready to gather in a coffee hour break out room today, with any others who would like to shape next steps and spiritual growth together: Immanuel's way. We'll be inviting you at the beginning of coffee hour to raise your hand to be in on that.

It's not the only invitation you'll get. You will not achieve racial justice and dismantle white supremacy for the world of God's dream in ten minutes! But we'll be alive to God, see the support in one another you'll have for the work, and come up with a date and time to talk more together about what's possible for beloved community at Immanuel and through you in gospel mission for the world God loves.

With saints and martyrs at the feast of life, we throw open this window and pray Come Holy Spirit! Let the church say, Amen!

June 21, 2020

Commemoration of the Emanuel Nine

The Rev. Dr. Kim L. Beckmann

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Evanston

Scripture:

Psalms 69:7-10

Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

⁶ Please take a moment to consider making this pledge, and more importantly, taking a step!

<https://elca.org/racialjusticepledge>

⁷ <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/>