

Sermon: Pentecost 5

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 28, 2015

Year B

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

What a week it's been... the House of Representatives passed legislation providing financial aid and training for those workers displaced by global trade... but nine people are dead... and some long awaited SCOTUS decisions have been released... the Affordable Care Act has been upheld... but nine people are still dead... the Supreme Court upheld the right of same-gender couples to marry in all 50 states... meanwhile nine people in Charleston are dead...

In the wake of these nine murders on June 17... just eleven days ago... there's been a lot of talk about the Confederate flag... the governor of South Carolina has called for its removal from state capitol grounds... similar conversations have occurred in other states... there have been calls to remove it from those state flags on which it appears... retailers Amazon... Target... Ebay... WalMart... Sears... and KMart... have announced that they'll no longer sell any confederate flag merchandise...

I remember... years ago... when those protesting the Vietnam War burned American flags... for some people... there was immeasurable furor... as though the protestors were literally burning mom... baseball... and apple pie... for others... there was a more metered response... after all... they were just burning a piece of fabric... the things which it represented... could not possibly be touched by these flames... and in 1969 the Supreme Court ruled that the burning of the flag is protected by the First Amendment.

But in the wake of these nine murders... there's been a change in our understanding... as Paul wrote... just because it's legal doesn't mean that it's edifying... and we seem to have a new appreciation for what symbols mean and how they're used... and who has

used them... and for what purpose... many insist that it's nothing more than a piece of history... while others insist that it has been used for... represents... and incites racism... hatred... and intimidation...

On Wednesday... while The Rev. Clementa Pickney lay in state in the South Carolina rotunda... the Confederate flag flew on statehouse grounds not far away... there was some hope that it could be removed... out of respect... even for a short time... because Dylan Roof boasted an embrace of that flag and what it means to so many... but in my opinion... unfortunately... the flag remained... although yesterday morning at about 6:30... a protestor climbed the flagpole... removed the flag... and was arrested when she returned to the ground... and when I read the article... at that time... the flag had not been replaced...

The flag of Hitler's Third Reich contained a swastika... a symbol... the word swastika comes from the Sanskrit... and ironically... means *good fortune* or *well-being*... the image appears to have first been used in Neolithic Eurasia... perhaps representing the movement of the sun through the sky... and to this day is a sacred symbol in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Odinism...

But I think somehow... if you tried to fly one of Hitler's flags... with a swastika... where Jewish people congregate... near where Jewish people worship... near the place where a Jewish person lay in state... and claim that it's just an innocent piece of history... if you tried to convince them that with it... you don't intend to imply hatred or genocide... if you claimed that it doesn't mean for you what it means for them... if you basically told them that how they feel doesn't matter... and that they should just honor your right to display it... I don't think you'd get very far...

So... how do we understand symbols of the past... simply as history... or do we consider how they're perceived... and what they mean to people now... do we value the

meaning people bring to their experiences... our laws protect freedom of expression... but do they protect the freedom to incite hatred...

One of the leaders of the synagogue came to Jesus... he was desperate... we don't know what he heard about Jesus... but he fell at Jesus' feet... in Jesus he saw a symbol of hope... of life... and he was willing to risk his position and authority... if it meant his twelve-year-old daughter might be healed and live...

And as he came... the crowds were pushing in on Jesus... touching him... but not asking for anything... but one woman touches Jesus in a different way... she had been bleeding for twelve years... she came to Jesus not just in desperation... but in faith...

John Shea writes: we are not told what she heard about Jesus... but she has obviously heard enough to develop an appropriate interior disposition... one that is able to receive the flow of divine power... this consciousness doesn't really require physical touch... as if only skin on skin contact produces healing... she knows that all she has to do... is just come into minimal contact with him... just effect a symbolic touching... just touch his cloak... there is spiritual love coming through Jesus and so some contact is necessary... and Jesus' desire to manifest compassionate love... is matched by her readiness to receive it... and the whole truth she tells Jesus goes beyond the simple laying on of hands... to include a communion of consciousness between them...

But still... she falls at Jesus' feet... she may have been afraid of what this crowd might do to her... even in public... once they realized that this ritually unclean woman was among them... the law would protect their right to inflict punishment... but her faith... her receptivity to all that Jesus offers... has healed her... and she can now go in peace... and in health...

On the way to Jairus' home... word comes that his daughter has died... that's why Jesus says... [do not fear... only believe...] [believe... even in the face of death...] and

when they arrive at Jairus' home... it's obvious that everyone's fear of death has diminished their faith... that's why he puts them out...

You see... in biblical thought... God owns blood... so God's love... working through Jesus... can stop the twelve-year flow of blood in the hemorrhaging woman... and can start the flow of blood in the twelve-year-old girl... Jesus wants Jairus and his wife not just to receive God's life-giving power... but to consciously cooperate in it... because divine love reveals that One stronger than death has arrived... and since God's love turns death into sleep... sleepers can be awakened...

It's our experience though... that there's sometimes too much blood flowing... or none... there are some illnesses that we can't heal... there is dying and death that we can't stop... and when we can't... when the question is no longer whether miracles did happen then or may still happen now... when we're unable to help the pain that comes from either... then the question becomes... how do we hold on to our faith... and I think the answer is that we hold onto our faith with each other... in community... by making sure that we don't bear these things alone... in loneliness... we're able to keep others from grieving alone... from bearing the weight of it by themselves... we are able to be there for each other when these things happen...

Can you imagine the loneliness this bleeding woman must have endured... for twelve years... ritually unclean... unable to fully take care of her daily needs... unable to go out in public... afraid of what might happen if she did... and can you imagine how healing it was... to be called Daughter... to be seen and welcomed... to be healed...

Four days after the killings at Mother Emanuel AME in Charleston... there was worship... this past Wednesday evening... there was Bible Study... these people are hurting... hurting terribly I imagine... but there is a deep sense of peace... they're not hurting alone... they have each other... are being there for each other... as Jesus was there for these two daughters... and is here for us through each other...

In court on Friday the 19th... some of the families expressed their unfathomable pain... and their forgiveness... Ethel Lance's daughter said: *I will never be able to hold my mother again, but I forgive you, and have mercy on your soul. You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people... but God forgives you, and I forgive you...*

This kind of response... this kind of forgiveness comes from a place of deep faith... it's the cooperating consciousness that the hemorrhaging woman brought to Jesus... and the pain these people feel is like a bleeding that won't stop... but there is a bleeding God who understands the pain of loneliness... and death... and this God offers a faith that turns death into sleep... these people know that symbols... used for hate... can't touch the truth of resurrection... they know that light overcomes darkness... that love overcomes hate... and the nine saints who were taken by hate... will live forever in love...

Mike+