

## 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

What would you say to a 21-year old man accused of murdering your mother? The daughter of Ethel Lance said this to Dylann Roof: “I will never be able to hold her 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.” Ten days ago in Charleston, South Carolina, Roof walked into a Wednesday night bible study at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, a building its members call Mother Emmanuel. He attended the class for one hour and then announced that he had come there in order “to kill black people.” According to witnesses he opened fire and killed nine members of the church.

This past Wednesday night, bible study resumed, and 150 people showed up. The church has an interim pastor now because their pastor was among the nine killed in the shooting. He said this to the group: “This territory belongs to God. Bible study will continue. Last week dark powers came over Mother Emmanuel. But that’s alright. God in his infinite wisdom said, ‘that’s alright. I’ve got the nine.’”

Roof is being held on nine counts of murder, and he will likely be charged with federal hate crimes as well. He posed for photos with a Confederate flag, an emblem that still flies over the capitol building in Charleston, where the remains of one victim, the pastor and state senator, went on public view. The Confederate flag is broadly regarded as a symbol of racism because the Confederate States fought the Civil War in this country in order to preserve slavery. Some descendants of those who lost their lives in battle believe that the flag should be preserved in honor of their ancestors. Others see this as thinly-veiled racism.

My grandmother’s grandfather, Forest F. Graves, was born in Mississippi in 1838 and enlisted as a private in the Confederacy in 1861. He was slighted wounded in the finger at the Battle of Murfreesboro, hospitalized with dysentery, and eventually returned to duty before the war ended. My family today has no tolerance for racism, and we do not support flying the Confederate flag. The shooter in South Carolina was hoping to open a war against black people; instead he has united people in defense of civil rights.

The Book of Wisdom says today, “God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.” There is no “domain of the netherworld on earth, for justice is undying.” We hear these words to prepare us for the miracle Jesus works in the gospel for the 12-year old daughter of Jairus. She had died, but Jesus brought her back to life. There are only a few stories of Jesus raising someone from the dead. Lazarus is perhaps the best known of them. But also here Jesus demonstrates his complete power over all the forces of evil, even death. It is not hard to believe that he has power over hatred as well.

Any one of us could become the victim of someone’s hate. We offer Wednesday night bible study here too. We come to church in faith, not in fear. If we practice faith in God and forgiveness of our neighbor every day, we will know what to say on the day that tragedy darkens our door. Like the people of Mother Emmanuel, we believe that this is God’s territory. Whatever happens here can be raised to life by the powerful hand of Jesus Christ.