

When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 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?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" ~ Mark 4:35-41

"Peace. Be still." Isn't that what Jesus said to the grieving disciples when he surprised them in the upper room after Easter? I will be the first to tell you that these words seem very insufficient in light of recent events in Charleston. Our hearts are heavy and our grief unbearable. This has been a sad week. There has been too much death at our own hands. Too much hate at our own teaching. We must weep. And then we must cry out! Ignoring the present storm only worked for Jesus. He was the only one who slept on that boat and when the disciples cried out to him he rose up and acted. He faced the storm and calmed it and then called on them, on us, to have the same faith. It's going to be alright. It really is.

If there is one message I can pull from today's Gospel and from the events of this week it is this: "Do not fear the storm." Instead we need to take this pain and talk about it. We can no longer ignore that there is a problem. Mosques, synagogues, Sikh temples, black churches have all recently been under attack. Racism is real. Hatred and fear of the other has been haunting us since the beginning of time, but the good news is that our God is bigger than that. And violence is never the last word. It wasn't at the cross and it isn't now. Love is the only answer in a world full of storms and our slain brothers and sisters at Mother Emanuel embodied that to their righteous end. They displayed kindness and hospitality to the stranger amongst them and it mattered. It didn't change the outcome for the victims of the shooting, but it did for the shooter, and it can for the rest of us too. For a moment or more Dylann Storm Roof, (and yes Storm is part of his name) the accused shooter, almost had a change of heart. For a moment he connected to the Christ present in that church and became a part of the Body. And that moment, however fleeting, is enough for God to work with. I truly believe that.

My brothers and sisters, we serve a God who hears our cries and is interested in our redemption through reconciliation. And when we are the storm God shouts at us "Peace! Be still!" God will not, will not let the storm consume us nor will God let us consume ourselves. We need only to have faith and then act in faith. Let us look to what Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church of Charleston South Carolina has shown us: what we do in this space matters! The message of love we profess is important. We just need to be more confident in proclaiming it outside of these doors. So don't ignore or fear the storm; calm it. Welcome the conversation around it and always, always, be the Christ present in it. It matters.

The Rev'd Jeanne M. Hansknecht
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St. Peter's Church, Cazenovia NY