



In the Aftermath

Just a few days ago, I was sitting at a lunch counter in the South. It was an exhibit in The Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, GA. With participant hands on the counter, eyes closed and wearing headphones, it is meant to simulate the African-American experience prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

As an emotionally charged, intellectual experience, it was shocking. I opened my eyes and pulled away in less than a minute - heart pounding, head spinning, destined to ponder things anew.

Soon after, came the emotionally charged, very real experience of Charlottesville, VA, where people who seem to long for those days before the Civil Rights Movement ripped further the fabric of a nation that is already dangerously frayed. These people embody the hatred and bigotry of white supremacy. Whether carrying torches or Nazi flags, armaments or merely the countenance of persons who see themselves as somehow superior to others, their very presence put the stain of human sin on full, painful, death-dealing display.

To be sure, “pondering anew” is a woefully insufficient response. And as important as it can be to rally publicly, to offer constructive criticism of political leaders when they fail to meet expectations, and to gather with persons of color as a sign of solidarity, the harder work, the more essential work for leaders in a church body that is predominantly white - especially in contexts like where I live and serve – is to respond “at home.” You see, the aftermath of Charlottesville, like the aftermath of the massacre in Charleston at Mother Emanuel A.M.E. Church, like so many hate-inspired aftermaths before, will set the stage for whatever horrific embodiment of racism comes next, unless we come to terms with the sin of racism “at home,” together.

This is not a call for preachers to preach “anti-racism” sermons. Preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Proclaim the gospel persistently, unambiguously. And clinging to the promises of the One who holds us fast, talk with each other. All of us. Preachers, parishioner, neighbors...talk with each other about racism and how it infiltrates so many aspects of our own living that we are unable or unwilling to see it. Study scripture together. Repent. Forgive. And pray.

In a masterful sermon in the aftermath of Charlottesville, Pastor Bradley E. Schmeling (Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN) writes, *“Maybe salvation is a deep sense of peace that God is in charge, even when it doesn't look like it. Maybe salvation is the courage to face the news, or the mirror, or the neighbor, or the future that we're being given. Maybe salvation is simply trusting the presence of Christ around us, holding us so close that we hear the voice of Jesus over the din of the storm.”*

May our very presence, put repentance and hope – hope in the life-giving promise of such salvation - on full display.

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