Fourth Sunday after Pentecost All Saints’ Church

Proper 7, Year B June 21, 2015

Job 38:1-11 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Psalm 107: 1-3; 23-32 Gospel of Mark 4:35-41

Let us pray: O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name. AMEN

You’ve seen him. We’ve all seen him.

5’ 8” inches, give or take; 140 pounds, maybe, if his clothes are all wet. He could wrap himself in his numerous racist flags- that might add some weight.

Blond, with a bad haircut, with bangs, even. Obviously, no girlfriend has helped him with his personal style.

Boyish, even with his tough snarly look that he poses over and over again; he can’t be 21. But he is. They keep telling us that.

When I first saw his photo flash across my T.V. screen, I thought, “My God you’re not even shaving yet. And you will never shave as a free man.”

But he has never been free, so filled with hate, bigotry and fear.

His identity has been sculpted as a hater. An internal tape he played over and over again in his head. He is chained to his Manifesto; a prisoner in more ways than one.

A few years ago, Homeland Security reported that our greatest threat for domestic terrorism was with those involved with the “skinhead nation.” Their numbers were greater than they had recognized.

Here he is- this boy, more than a threat.

The most poignant thing he said, after he was arrested, was that he almost didn’t go through with the murders because the people he was sitting with in Bible Study were so nice to him.

But then, no. He had to complete his mission.

In South Africa, KwaZulu Natal, a word emerged from the villages that now defines the soul of the country: Ubuntu.

It’s a difficult word to define; let me try.

Our humanity is not ours to claim. It comes to us a gift, bestowed upon us as freedom, as love, as possibility, as grace. We are human because God made us so. This humanity cannot be sustained on our own, either. We hold it between each other’s fingers. We remind each other of this fragile, delicate, exquisite gift. I can only see my humanity in you and you can only see your humanity in me. I am because we are. Ubuntu.

Though we cannot claim this gift of humanity as our own making, we can strip ourselves of it through acts of evil. If you murder, maim, rape…… you lose the gift. You have destroyed it. You are no longer human, lost forever as an animal defined by the evil you have committed.

The only way your humanity can be restored is if someone in your community forgives you. They hold your humanity in their hands. Will you be restored back to the living? Ubuntu.

This young man stood in his striped prison jump suit before family and friends of the nine victims who were killed by his murderous heinous act.

And that secular court room and everything that it held- with its fluorescent bright lights, cheap furniture, cameras, reporters, even the inept attempt by the judge to be “inclusive” were all transformed into the Kingdom of God.

“May God have mercy on your soul. You hurt me; you hurt a lot of people. God forgives you. And I forgive you.”

“We are the family that love built; we have no room for hate, so I must forgive you.”

Take this opportunity to repent. Give your life to Christ, so he can change your ways. Then no matter what happens to you, you will be ok, you will be in such a better place than where you are now.

Everyone is praying for your soul. Hate won’t win. Love will.”

Those members of Mother Emanuel restored that man’s humanity in front of the whole nation. His humanity has been returned. These people loved him, before the killing, and now, even after the killing, they loved him deeply.

We saw Christ in that room, Christ enacted.

Paul speaks about this possibility over and over again. He lives by faith, urging us to open wide our hearts, no matter the “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, no matter” (2 Corinthians 6: 4-5)…..so “that we might live no longer for ourselves but for Christ who died and was raised for us by the power of the Holy Spirit and sent from God as Christ’s first gift to those who believe.”

Yes, we are all broken, weak, frightened, arrogant and susceptible to evil forces masquerading as power and purpose, and yet in Christ we are none of this:

We are imposters, yet are true;

As unknown, yet are well known;

As dying, and see, we are alive;

As punished, yet not killed;

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;

As poor, yet rich;

As having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Mother Emanuel, God with Us, you were stripped of your love ones, and yet with nothing, you possessed everything: your love reigned in that courtroom.

You turned that torrid scene of crucifying pain into Life Everlasting.

The Secular became the Sacrament right before our very eyes: Christ Alive, given to the world.

Thank you, Mother Emanuel for your witness and for opening our hearts, wide.

AMEN

(the Rev.) Jamie L. Hamilton