

Tragedy in Charleston – June 2015

Last night members of the Crosspointe family gathered in our chapel to pray and study the Bible. People discussed needs in their lives and the lives of those they love and we prayed for them. People offered praise for the wonderful things God is doing in their lives and we rejoiced with them. We dug into the Scriptures and had a rich discussion about what it means to be witnesses to God's love for us.

Last night members of the Emmanuel AME family gathered in their church in Charleston, South Carolina for the same reasons. I imagine they had a rich time of Bible study, prayer and fellowship. This church, known affectionately as "Mother Emmanuel," was used to visitors so when the young white man walked into the Bible study no one thought it out of place. In fact, most churches welcome new faces. But when that young man walked out of the church over an hour later he left behind nine dead bodies, survivors whose lives are forever changed, and yet another horrific testimony to evil in our fallen world.

I do not have the words to express the sorrow I feel, the shame I feel, the love I feel, and even the anger I feel. I am sorry for the loss these families are experiencing; those they loved are suddenly not there. I am ashamed that anyone could feel the need, however twisted their mind may be, to wantonly kill, because this is sin and I am a sinner. I love my Christian brothers and sisters who are now experiencing life to its fullest; and I love my Christian brothers and sisters who are left behind to ask the questions that simply have no fulfilling answers this side of eternity. And a part of me is furious at this young man for walking into God's house and committing this horrible act.

There is much still to be discovered and much more will be said about this in the coming weeks and months. It seems obvious that racism was the motivating factor in this action. It is a shame that racism is still an issue in our country, but it is. As followers of Jesus we must do what we can to reach out to everyone, regardless of our differences. John tells us, in his vision of Heaven, that he saw folks "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" gathered around the throne (Rev. 7:9).

But this is deeper than racism. Racism is simply a form of sin and sin is what is wrong with us. Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. It is easy to hold up someone like this killer as an extreme sinner and somehow feel better about ourselves, but the fact is we all fall short of God's glory. We are all in the same condition – fallen – and the price of this condition is death (Romans 6:23).

Nearly everyone will ask the question, "Why?" in this situation. The answer is sin, but that is not a satisfying answer to so many people, because so many people don't believe in sin, or even in God. I'm sure there are reasons that will surface regarding the killer's childhood, influences, mental state, etc., and they will all be valid ... but the root of it all remains sin. Sin separates us from the God who loves us, and it can separate us eternally.

Grieve with the families that are suffering. Pray for them, as well as this young man and his family. Pray for Emanuel Church. Pray that this tragedy will lead some to God. And be witnesses to the love God has so graciously shown to you. Only through love can the hearts of killers be changed. Only through love can the hearts of sinners be changed.