

Peace! Wake Up!  
Job 38:1-11 Mark 4:35-41  
The Week of the Pope's Encyclical on Climate Change  
and the killing of 9 members of  
Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
in Charleston, South Carolina.

Father's Day Connection. Thanked my father for raising me up in a church that taught me that God is love and that racism is wrong.

My original intention for today was to focus on Pope Francis' Encyclical on Climate Change

Then the tragic, gut wrenching, heart-breaking, hate crime, committed against nine Christians engaged in the act of prayer, in the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina made me want to throw everything I had planned out the window.

Then as I read sections of the Pope's Encyclical and the Scripture Readings for this morning I began to see a connection between global warming and the racist killing in Charleston.

I want to share some passages from the Encyclical of Pope Francis, entitled,  
*On Care for our Common Home*

1. "LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore" - "Praise be to you, my Lord".

In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs".[1]

Pause...

Share thoughts on the diversity of creation

2. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22).

We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Pause...

Reflect upon the way we have seen ourselves as lords and masters not only of the gifts of the natural world but also on the indigenous peoples of the world.

10. I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. St. Francis. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Pause... Reflect upon this passage as the essence of the Christian message.

11. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs.

By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

Pause... Here is the connection between global warming and racism – turning a subject, a manifestation of God, into an object that we can use exploit.

From a spiritual point of view, everything created is a manifestation of God.

When we turn the elements of the earth into objects that we can exploit rather than care for, that is separating ourselves from God, that is missing the mark of our place in the creation.

When we turn a person into an object, an object of hate, an object to be used for our personal or social needs, that is a sin, a separation from God, neighbor and our self.

As I reflect both on the crisis of racism and pollution I want to lift up the Biblical lament, how long, O Lord, how long?

Or I want to turn the question that the disciples asked of Jesus into a question we could ask of ourselves

Do we not care that we are perishing?

Do we not care that racism is still being taught to our young people in this country?

Do we not care that white privilege is a source of the exploitation of people of color in this country and around the world as well as a source of exploitation of planet, our home?

I can raise that question in this congregation because I know that we do care.

I know that our hearts are breaking

for the planet,

and for the people Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

And I know that we are not alone in the lament and in this struggle for living lives of integrity and compassion.

We have sisters and brothers who are ready to teach us and inspire us.

Including Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III, Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, who wrote these words about Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Yolanda Pierce, professor of African American religion and literature at Princeton Theological Seminary, reminds us that “the African Methodist Episcopal denomination was founded as a protest against racism” and “the black church was birthed as a sanctuary from white violence.”

This is true of Emanuel AME, affectionately known as “Mother” Emanuel. Its storied history dates back almost 200 years. Mother Emanuel endured despite being burned down, outlawed and destroyed by an earthquake.

Emanuel AME has been the target of racist attacks, legal harassment and arson. Each instance from 1818 to 2015 when a person drunk on the wine of confederate supremacy entered the doors of the church, and set out upon his plan of eliminating a sanctuary committed to teaching the south “a more excellent way” called love.

Emanuel at every turn has responded with love rooted in justice by teaching literacy, producing leaders, protesting unequal treatment, fighting for economic parity and demanding the confederate flag be replaced by a symbol for all South Carolinians. Mother Emanuel exemplifies the best of our religious tradition—liberation, love and reconciliation.

When we see the faces of those who were lost and learn of their lives, we are devastated not just by the senselessness of the act but also because we know these victims. We know them—the civil servants, the recent graduate, the librarian, the track coach, the grandfather and the great-grandmother.

They are representative of the members of almost any black church, assembled under the leadership of a civic-minded young pastor. They were hunted down by a young person infected with racialized hatred and mental instability who had access to weapons designed for sport. He has terrorized all of us.

His actions will not terrify us from remaining true to the history and mission of the black church. In honor of those nine souls and of the countless others who preceded them, we will continue to exist, to protest, to remain open, to stand, and to pray. The doors of the church are open.

The doors of the church are open to hear a story that says the foundation of the earth are good and that light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hate, that a tree planted by the waters we shall not be moved.

The disciples were crossing the sea and a great storm arose  
and they called out to sleeping Jesus,

are you not afraid, can't you see we're in trouble here, save us.

Who was Jesus talking to when he said, Peace be still!

The sea, or the disciples themselves?

We are in the middle of many storms:

Pollution, racism, poverty, war,

exploitation of human and natural resources by corporations controlled by greed.

And in the middle of that there is Pope Francis who is going to cause a few waves of his own.

218. In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.

“To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart”.

Yesterday during our songs of peace event with Congregation Shir Shalom we sang  
“ain't gonna study war no more.”

May we be a congregation that engages in the study and the engaged practice of peace that brings about a change of heart and reconciled relationships with the earth and all of its blessed inhabitants.

I would like to close with words written by friend Rev. Stephen Garnaas-Holmes.

“And in that peace we shall awaken. Not fear, but our sister's and brothers' cries awaken us. We rise, as Christ rises, always in hope. In deep peace, not in fear or anger, we will rise and stand in the storm. The winds will whip us. The waves will batter us. But we will stand, because Christ stands in us. We will cry out to the storm, and cry out to our sisters and brothers with a peace stronger than the storm.

“Peace! Be still!”

Peace! Be Awake!”