

Jesus ordered the disciples to take nothing for their journey except a staff:

This weekend as our nation celebrates American Freedom, Independence and the national image of self-reliance we continue process the events at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and the impact this is having on many communities. Simultaneously we are metaphorically looking over our shoulders because we are on high alert. How much moreso are predominantly black churches in the South and perhaps even here looking over their shoulders wondering if theirs will be a 8th church to be burned in less than two weeks? In an interview with a reporter from the Washington Post The Rev. Bobby Jean Jones of Glover Grove Baptist Church in Warrenton, SC, said: "Everything is gone – books, robes, all my pictures, all my degrees....All the history is gone. It's all for the good, because God is in control and not me, that's why I a calm..."

It is important this morning that we as Christians pause to reflect on Christian Dependence upon God and reliance upon Grace. The murders and the choice to forgive by Emanuel AME has put America on notice, God is not done with us. We as Christians, particularly those who are as I am, white, need to step up our game. If you, like me, feel a bit overwhelmed with where to begin then let's begin as Christians with the Word of God. And rather than asking What Would Jesus Do? I am asking us **to consider What DID Jesus Do?**

Over the course of the past weeks the gospel stories have presented Jesus going into the pagan territory to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to the Jews dispersed among the pagans, afraid, they asked him to leave and not come back. We heard him come back to Galilee to preach the Good News to the Israelites towns, there seemed some faith. Today we hear he went home to bring the Good News of the Kingdom and he was amazed at their lack of faith. It is clear that things went from bad to worse.

Jesus' mission statement: "To seek and save the lost of the house of Israel." He sought the lost in 3 places and had three different responses. **He had a message, he performed deeds of great power**, and went out **to meet the people where they were**. Yet he clearly was not getting the response he expected. What more could he do?

Jesus recognizes he needed a new strategy to support the mission and engage others in a new vision of the kingdom of God. **So what did he do?** He chose twelve and sent them out two by two empowering them with authority over unclean spirits....but there was a catch, **in order to take on this power, to take up his mission, to proclaim this vision** of the Kingdom of God. Jesus **orders** them to take nothing except a staff. In so doing he is telling them they **must become vulnerable, powerless and completely dependent upon the good will of others.**

What is **most remarkable** is not that he ordered them and sent them out with nothing except a staff; **but rather that they went!** Then **Amazing....**things happened **abundance of grace flowing through them:** they cast out many demons, anointed and cured the sick and proclaimed all should repent.

Last week I drew your attention to the fact that as a result of the grace of forgiveness operative at the core of the families and congregation of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church there were no riots, no looting, no need for the National Guard, no curfew, no violence. This week I draw your attention to the fact that in the last ten days seven black churches burned. Three are undoubted cases of arson the other four in question.

The intentional burning of churches is another form of the violation of the Body of Christ. These violations are acts of aggression, power and dominance just as surely as acts of murder and rape. A reporter from the Washington Post quoted David A. Love of the Atlanta BlackStar: “From slavery and the days of Jim Crow through the civil rights movement and beyond, white supremacists have targeted the Black church because of its importance as a pillar of the Black community, the center for leadership and institution building, education, social and political development and organizing to fight oppression. Strike at the Black church, and you strike at the heart of Black American life.”

These acts against the Body of Christ, whether murder in the midst of the congregation or burning the church remind us this morning of the vulnerability of our black sisters and brothers. But, if that is all they remind us of then we are not tuning into God’s call to us. As a northern white Christian woman I will never know the vulnerability my black sisters and brothers live with. I am personally struggling with how easy it is for me to avoid being vulnerable let alone feeling vulnerable or threatened. I feel pain, indignation at the affront and assault against my sisters and brothers. Honestly I feel a day late and a dollar short. But that is not stopping me. I want to be part of the solution, part of the repair and I would dearly love us as a congregation to prayerfully consider being part of the repair.

As I said a few minutes ago, God is not done with us. Jesus calls every Christian in baptism to take nothing but a staff and go out to proclaim, cast out demons and heal. And we will feel vulnerable and uncomfortable doing this. In the words of Paul Kivel: “Racism is based on the concept of whiteness – a powerful fiction enforced by power and violence”. Racism in America is system of institutional domination of one group of people over another. Racism lives as long as I am silent. As long as I am silent I am complicit. I’ve realized that racism lives as long as I distance myself and point to others by claiming the northern myth that I am not like those people: white southerners, I am not a white supremacist, I am not a skin heads or Klan. However, the moment I drop this justification and I am willing to become conscious of my whiteness and own the advantages of being white, then I am able to see those whom the system of racism disadvantages.

Social Action Social Justice is a part of the history of this congregation – it is so to speak in the pews of this place. Washington Irving was an active abolitionist. His pew is a constant reminder to us of that fact. I am inviting you to become an abolitionist, to abolish the silence that feeds the fire of white power, privilege and supremacy that hurts our sisters and brothers. Let’s join together to create a fire line that prevents the violence of white-supremacy from violating the black community. In the week to come I am asking that everyone in this congregation take the first step by breaking the silence once this week. **Jesus ordered the disciples to take nothing but a staff. Today, I ask that we re-imagine that staff as a fire extinguisher.**