



# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

## **A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 21, 2020**

### **Black Lives Matter**

by Garland F. Pierce

#### **Genesis 21:9-10, 16-18**

21:9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.

21:10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac."

21:16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

21:17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.

21:18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."

#### **Matthew 10:29-31**

10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

10:30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted.

10:31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

It seems since Genesis, some folks have valued the lives of some folks at the expense of the lives of other folks. Several millennia later, every indicator (political, social, economic, and even theological and ecclesiological) points to the fact that this arrogant and dangerous practice

continues today. The deaths and violence as well as the protests in response to them indicate that all lives really have not mattered nor do they matter still. On the heels of Juneteenth when many remember the emancipation of all slaves in the USA, we are reminded that the declaration at the founding of the country that “All men are created equal” only applied to some. And because of this unequal valuation and application in the US and other parts of the world, after emancipation came lynching, Jim Crow, segregation, separate and unequal, colonization, Apartheid, red-lining, racialized policing, and the figurative and actual knee on the neck and shot in the back of far too many for far too long.

On this day, Father’s Day in the USA, we must wrestle with this lectionary passage from Genesis, recounting Sarah valuing her son Isaac’s life at the expense of the life of Hagar’s son, Ishmael, and the father of both Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham, ultimately agreeing with the valuation. Sarah’s demand and Abraham’s compliance put the lives of Hagar and Ishmael at risk; but, God intervenes and offers another appraisal and an everlasting promise. Ishmael’s life matters; for a great nation shall be made of him.

In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples, Jesus makes plain that the disciples’ value as well as the value and validity of their work and the gospel that they seek to share will be challenged, rejected, and seen as a threat by some; but, God will intervene and offer another appraisal grounded in the intimate and detailed way of God knowing each and every one of us—down to the numbers of hairs on our heads. The disciples’ lives matter, much more than a sparrow. If God’s care extends to the smallest of creature, surely it extends to us.

On this day, the African Methodist Episcopal Church remembers our beloved who valued and welcomed a stranger into their midst to study God’s word as a means of grace. Their assessment of his worth and worthiness was far greater than his of theirs. Filled with hatred, he ambushed and slaughtered them the night of June 17, 2015, in the basement fellowship hall of Mother Emanuel, Charleston. Their lives didn’t matter to him no more than to serve as catalysts for a race war, for which he hoped. Five years later we declare that those nine lives matter still as do the others who have met untimely deaths as a result of the hatred, distrust, and assault on Black bodies and lives.

Perhaps you have seen it too; the little Black girl’s protest sign simply read, “We said Black Lives Matter. We never said only Black Lives Matter. We know All Lives Matter. We just need your help with Black Lives Matter. Because Black Lives are in Danger!”

The God of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, and of Hagar and Ishmael hears our cry. The God of the sparrow, the blessed Son, Emanuel, and the fiery power of the Holy Spirit encourage us to go forth into a hostile world bearing witness to the liberating gospel and fighting the good fight, with the assurance of our worth and God’s love even for those that the world deems least and last.

**TALK:** Take a moment to be silent, reflect, and share/write down—What might you do to help others understand that Black Lives do matter? What small, faithful actions can/will you take to demand that policies and systems recognize the value of Black Lives?

**PRAY:** O God of understanding, wisdom, strength and power, we remember before You this day our brothers and sisters whose lives were snatched by a heart of hatred and bigotry. We remember before You nine faithful servants, whose lives were violently taken while peacefully studying Your Word. We call their names before You, these martyrs, these sacrificed lives, the Mother Emanuel Nine:

- The Honorable Reverend Clementa Pinckney
- The Reverend Daniel Simmons
- The Reverend Sharonda Coleman-Singleton
- Sister DePayne Middleton Doctor
- Sister Cynthia Hurd
- Sister Susie Jackson
- Sister Ethel Lance
- Brother Tywanza Sanders
- Sister Myra Thompson

We pray that Your eternal light will shine on them.

Father, in this safe and trusted space we come to cry, to vent, to grieve with their families and Emanuel AME Church; to release our anger, and to unpack the emotions of this great loss. To find a place to sow our tears and mend the inner wounds that rise from our memory of the seventeenth day of June, two thousand and fifteen.

In Jesus' Name, we ask You to shine your light of hope through us as we live in this uncertain world of hatred and violence. Show us the way, O God, that we as a united Body can cut off the horns of bigotry and hatred and prejudice that bully their way into the faces of Your people.

We pray for peace and love to reign in our homes, and communities. We pray for deliverance from feelings of hatred and mercilessness that make their way into our hearts. Help us to move forward in faith, trusting You to heal us in Your time and release us to love all people.

Hear us, O Lord, as we rest in the safety of Your loving presence. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

*Prayer by Ms. Carlene L. Douglas <http://www.iamame.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Prayer.pdf>*

**ACT:**

1. As you remember the Emanuel 9, those survivors, families, and church family of that tragic event as well as others who have died or suffered from racist acts of violence and death, make a commitment to act and make an action plan. (You may choose to use the resource by Jacquelyn Dupont Walker, Consultant, AMEC Social Action Commission.)
2. See also the activity that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

**Song:**

When Peace, Like a River  
(It Is Well with My Soul)  
AMEC Hymnal, #448

1. When peace, like a riv-er, at-tend-eth my way,  
When sor-rows, like sea bil-lows, roll; What-ev-er my lot,  
Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.

*Refrain*

*It is well (It is well) with my soul, (with my soul) It is well, it is well with my soul.*

2. Though Sa-tan should buf-fet, though tri-als should come,  
Let this blest as-sur-ance con-trol,  
That Christ has re-gard-ed my help-less es-tate,  
And has shed His own blood for my soul.

*Refrain*

3. My sin-oh, the bliss of this glo-ri-ous thought:  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

*Refrain*

4. And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,  
The trump shall re-sound and the Lord shall de-scend,  
“E-ven so,” it is well with my soul.

*Refrain*

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



MOTHER EMANUEL  
**REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

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*Remember. Reflect. Refocus.*

*The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.*