

Now is the Time!

Proper 7, Year B – 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 21, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Well, I've done it again! I tossed and turned much of the night last night, playing and replaying elements from what I wanted to say this morning. And then I got up, even before my way too early alarm rang, to write a sermon that should have been written days ago. I had a pretty good idea what I was going to say this morning as early as Wednesday. I even told some folks about it then. But my procrastination got the better of me once again this week, and I put it off so that I ended up with not enough sleep last night, and even less really sound rest.

At least partially in my defense, I sometimes let myself get busier than I should. This past week was one of those times, of course, being the Vacation Bible School story-teller, and with the Vestry meeting, and the meetings that go with the Vestry meeting, and the presentation to the Rotary Club about my trip, and yard work to catch up (some!) from being gone on my trip, and a wonderful social event last evening, and doing time – I mean, helping out – in Miss Ella's RC booth yesterday. (sigh) It just adds up.

And part of it is that I sometimes have the attention span of a gnat. Most of you have spent enough time with me to know oh-too-well how easy it is for me to get distracted from my main train of thought. I might be talking about something really meaningful or important to me, when something comes along from outside that stream, or from inside that stream for that matter, and... Squirrel!

But part of my problem has always been just plain old procrastination, a laziness, I suppose, that has plagued me as long as I can remember, a seeming difficulty knowing for certain when to get something started, and when to get it finished, when the time is really *right*.

In our Epistle reading this morning, St. Paul quotes God's promise through the prophet Isaiah, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

That phrase was already firmly stuck in my mind when I heard about the shooting that murdered nine people at their Wednesday prayer meeting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. In case you didn't know, the AME Church was founded by the Rev. Richard Allan, one of two pastors who walked out of a Methodist church dedication when they were denied a seat with the other pastors present, because of the color of their skin. The other was the Rev. Absalom Jones, who became the first African American priest of the Episcopal Church.

The names of those slain are the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, 41 years old; Cynthia Hurd, 54; the Rev. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, 45; Tywanza Sanders, 26; Ethel Lance, 70; Susie Jackson, 87; Depayne Middleton Doctor, 49; the Rev. Daniel Simmons, 74; and Myra Thompson, 59. At a hearing Friday, their relatives were given the opportunity to address the court. Nearly all of them addressed the gunman instead. One after another, their message was simple, "I forgive you."

With a lot of people, I wondered at how soon after such a profound tragedy these people were able to reach, even beyond their own grief, to forgiveness. And then it occurred to me that maybe it *is* time for us to forgive. I'm not talking about forgiving just the racist gunman in South Carolina. Maybe it's time for us to forgive – period. "At an acceptable time I have listened to you," Paul quotes. "See, *now*," he says, "*now* is the acceptable time!"

Maybe it's time to forgive those we delight to read about, those we glue our eyes to on the TV, those we click on, and click on, and click on, those whose deeds of violence or decadence or perversity we lap up as entertainment, and feed on to fuel our outrage and to confirm our own prejudices toward *that* ethnic group, or *that* religion, or *that* race. Maybe instead of spending so much of our time watching and viewing and following and liking and sharing, maybe it's time to *forgive* the hate and the greed and the

depravity, and break the hold of their practitioners on our own life. Maybe it's time to forgive – period. “See, *now* is the acceptable time!”

And while we're at it, maybe it's time to forgive those that we feel have insulted our sense of order or our personal points of privilege, the ones whose order is marginalized by the institution of *our* order, whose security is weakened or even negated by the institution of *our* security, whose privilege is denied by the institution of *our* privilege, whose outrage is fed, and sometimes fanned to flame, by *our* outrage. Maybe it's time to forgive – period. “See, *now* is the acceptable time!”

And then maybe it's time for *us* to seek forgiveness: For our part in the institutionalization of our order and our security and our privilege. For our appropriation of what we have considered a right of our birth, or our station, or our ability to pay. For our grasping natures and our seeming obsession with accumulation. For our “keeping up with the Joneses,” and for our trying to outdo the Joneses. Maybe it's time that *we* seek forgiveness – period. “See, *now* is the acceptable time!”

I'm sorry. I had meant to have a more upbeat something to say to you this morning. It is a beautiful spring day. It is Father's Day. It is our annual outdoor celebration and barbeque. But in my usual procrastination, I put it off, until a gunman killed nine of my neighbors and yours. And sleep did not come last night, as I remembered Clementa, Cynthia, Sharonda, Tywanza, Ethel, Susie, Depayne, Daniel, and Myra.

Every day, every hour, every minute of time is our opportunity to forgive and be forgiven. Every moment of time has been created for us to choose to love our Creator and to love one another, or to feed the power of division and destruction and despair. Every instant of time is a *singularity* of decision, a chance for us to choose whether we will follow that path of destruction, or seek the path of forgiveness and love. “See, *now*,” St. Paul tells us, “*now* is the acceptable time!” “See, *now* is the day of salvation!”