

18 June 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

My heart experienced the unimaginable late last night as the sun began to set in some places, and before the moon could peak through weary cloud-cast skies in others.

The very thing I fight and organize against—a deeply masked and far reaching culture of violence in our society has descended upon the steps of my family and matriculated its way into the sanctuary of the church. Last night during bible study and prayer service, a gunman entered the historical Mother Emmanuel AME church of Charleston, SC and opened fire on the 11 persons gathered there. There were only two survivors.

With deep sorrow, I write to share that my beloved first cousin was among the 9 fatalities. Her death was confirmed this morning and the unspeakable grief of this loss has knocked me and my family off kilter.

C.S. Lewis wrote that “it is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box...” But suppose your life depended on that invisible rope that is your faith? Today, the weight of that invisible rope tugs at my trembling heart and such invisible faith is tested as we walk through the valleys of the shadows of death all around us. We are reassured to fear not evil, but to trust in the rod and the staff for comfort, protection, guidance and perhaps understanding when the morning comes.

Please keep my family, Mother Emmanuel congregation, and all those impacted by this rampant culture of violence in the center of your prayers.

Let us come together for such a time as this to the sacred clearing—no matter our faith or practice, and be on one accord in the spirit of love, hope, and healing to seek justice and peace for these and other victims of hatred and violence.

Let us put our faith to action and be more than empty drums that have long lost their melodies or arrangements. Let us remove our instruments from the poplar trees and call the people, the public officials, and yes, the church to action to address the festering sores of racism, classism and militarism—as they intersect this culture of violence. How can we begin to eradicate this evil without acknowledging the realities of racialized policing, hate crimes, and the disproportionate acts of violence against Black and Brown bodies?

Alas, it is morning and tear filled dew drops fall fresh upon my face, with eyes watching God and a soulful lament. Our hearts are troubled, but our faith remains steadfast, trusting and believing in the reconciling power of God for the brokenhearted and the oppressed.

Yours in faith & justice,

Waltrina

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