

## Love, Justice and Mercy after Charleston

By the Rt. Rev. Allen K. Shin

**A**s I write this, we are in the immediate aftermath of the Charleston shootings. I still feel outraged and heartbroken, and tremble inside with anger and fear. My brain is numb with sheer disbelief; it has gone blank on what to make of such calculated, cold-hearted violence—or of the sad rhetoric of some pundits, and even some presidential candidates, who try to find a way to rationalize this hate crime as an unfortunate one-off incident, the act of a mentally ill person—or even say that the perpetrator doesn't look white (believe it or not). They are in denial: This may be an extraordinary crime, but it tears open the centuries-old wounds of white racism against African Americans, which sadly continues today.

I understand how one can sacrifice oneself for another person in the name of love. We call that passion, and Jesus is its greatest example. But, I utterly fail to understand how one can murder another innocent person in the name of something as irrational as racial hatred. How much does one have to hate oneself in order to carry out such a senseless crime against others? Perhaps I am just a naïve idealist—but at the moment I'm trying very hard to hold on to any small strand of human goodness, and to search for even a small grain of redemptive grace.

Perhaps, though, a sense of goodness and a hope of grace come from the victims' families themselves who, at the gunman's hearing, said to him, "We forgive you and have mercy on your soul." "Hate won't win," the granddaughter of the 74 year-old victim, Daniel Simmons, told him. "My grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate. Everyone's plea for your soul is proof that they lived in love and their legacies live in love." If anyone has the right to forgive this racist perpetrator, it would be the victims' families, who are mourning now, and will have to endure deep pain in their hearts and souls for the rest of their lives.

Their gracious words are not the words of tolerance—for such a hate crime could never be tolerated by anyone or by any society. They are the words of love—the love that courageously stands up to the hatred that desecrates the sanctity and the dignity of humanity.

We must never tolerate racism, injustice and violence in any form. Yet as Christians we are also called to practice love. Jesus did not say, "Tolerate God and tolerate your neighbor," but "Love God and love your neighbor." He even said, "Love your enemy." It's easy to hate. But to love, to love even the enemy,

would require all that we can muster up from our humanity and more.

We must stand with the families of the victims, because redemption, healing, and reconciliation can only come from love, justice, and mercy; they will never come from hatred, violence and racism.

The incarnation is not just about the revelation of God in Jesus—the Christ-like God. In his incarnate nature and reality, Jesus also reveals to us how to be human—the Christ-like human. We minimize and lessen the weight of Jesus' humanity because it is challenging, inconvenient, and uncomfortable; because the weight of Jesus' humanity is too heavy a burden for us. But, every time we encounter such senseless violence as the Charleston shootings, we come face to face with the humanity of Jesus crucified on the cross—the innocent victim of senseless hate, of a broken legal system, and of a sinful, unredeemed humanity.

More urgently than ever, the humanity of Jesus Christ is precisely what we need to encounter and proclaim to the world.

In the incarnational paradigm, Jesus reveals to us how to be human in the fullness of sanctity and holiness. He exemplifies holiness by going to the most difficult places of human reality: ministering to the marginalized and the oppressed, healing the sick, suffering with those who suffer, dining with the sinners, and ultimately going to the cross of Calvary. The incarnational human paradigm of Jesus Christ calls all his followers to walk the journey of holy humanity with him to those most difficult places of human reality.

In this very human journey of holiness, we are assisted by the surprising grace of God, who intervenes when we go astray and carries us when we are weak, and who ultimately redeems and heals our broken humanity to something akin to Jesus' own humanity. For now, the redemptive grace in the Charleston shooting can only be glimpsed in the victims' families who have firmly stood on the side of love, justice and mercy. How God's grace will further the redeeming work in this remains a mystery. But we must participate in and further the work of healing and reconciliation in order that our own humanity may not be consumed by the evil powers of hatred, violence and racism. We must not tolerate such hatred, nor its condoning or rationalization. We must rise and stand on the side of love, justice and mercy. We must protect and preserve the holiness of our common humanity.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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*Shin is bishop suffragan of the diocese.*