

PEACE BROKE OUT

Rob Robinson

He meant to start a war. One solitary depraved, delusional, hostile assassin committed a senseless, devastating act against a peaceable group of mostly women assembled for Bible study. He must have imagined that there was a virtual army of closet racists like himself just waiting for one bold enough to light the match to start a conflagration of violence fueled by bigotry and hatred. Instead, an army of mourning, confused, dismayed citizens of Charleston slowly filled the streets and other venues to give and receive support in both organized and impromptu vigils. He meant to start a war. But instead, peace broke out.

Politicians, activists and journalists struggle to find appropriate labels: racism, terrorism, mass murder, hate crime. It is so perplexing that not even the arraigning judge nor the president have managed to comment on it without being subject to recriminations. The closest there has been to a war has been the scrambling of political opportunists who see in the event an occasion to score some points with their followers or cast aspersions upon their opponents.

But there were no riots or angry mobs in Charleston such as we have seen in other parts of the nation. As for the citizens of Charleston and the nation, instead of war, hundreds (maybe thousands) of whites and blacks assembled in the streets, churches and in other public places, black hands holding white hands, singing gospel songs, praying and expressing solidarity. No one orchestrated that. But thank God for it! Maybe it happened because it is the best response or perhaps even the only sane response. Perhaps it happened because hearts are led by the teachings of Jesus Christ, who does still have a strong influence in our land. He taught, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God...Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High...”* Here is a model for us to learn from. Let us be peaceable, peace loving and peace-making people. Even in a polarized nation such as we live in today, Charleston gives us hope that peace, mutual respect, non-violence and rational dialogue are the way to resolve our problems. Doesn't that sound like something we have heard before? Matt 5:9, Luke 6:35