Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The people of our nation have been suffering from a widely publicized tsunami of violence and hatred now for several decades. Whether that violence strikes our children when they are presumed to be safe at school as in Columbine or Newtown, we are just conducting ordinary business in a building in Oklahoma City, when it snuffs out the lives of people of color in the course of being apprehended or now even when it attacks those engaged in prayer at church, we are horrified. We Americans have endured the torment of this tsunami for far longer than any actual ferocious display of the sea’s power could manage to sustain.

Like the disciples in today’s Gospel passage who were terrified in the presence of the violent storm that surrounded them, we have gathered in churches, synagogues, and mosques to beg the mercy of God to calm these waters of hatred and carnage. For many people, it might seem that Jesus is indeed asleep during the midst of these terrors. This tsunami is powered by blatant racism, the unattended or under-attended needs of individuals who suffer emotional or psychological illnesses, and by means of the easy availability and proliferation of weapons. The result has been the overwhelming and the too frequent experience of national grief and horror.

This evening, the Word of God summons us to consider the force of the sea and the wind as an invitation to Faith. After all, we are all now disciples – all of us followers of Jesus, with just about the same degree of confidence as those fishermen who knew or should have known the peril that the sea and the wind could provide. They knew that the storm that they were experiencing that evening could bring a sudden death to all those in that little boat being tossed about effortlessly on the part of the wind and sea. Jesus sleeps! Through the boat’s rocking and weaving and bobbing about, Jesus sleeps! Get-up Jesus. Doesn’t it matter to you that we are going to perish?

Poor souls that they were! No one ever drowns when Jesus is in the boat! That is the awe-inspiring majesty of the response of the family members of those whose lives were viciously taken a few days ago in Charleston, South Carolina. Their courageous and compassionate willingness to exchange forgiveness for vengeance is a faith witness that reminds us all of the
ultimate triumph of love over hatred – especially in those moments when hatred has made such a powerful public display of its evil presence. In this very community, a universally recognized heroic man born just around the block from where we are now, who in time managed to remind our nation that hatred is never cast out by hatred, but only by love.

The faith community of Emanuel AME was battered about pretty severely this week. While some of their members were praying and then suddenly subject to violence, the tsunami struck again. Wake-up Jesus! Doesn't it matter that we might all drown!? But how could the faith which Jesus established and lived, died, and rose for succumb to the wind and the sea?

Disciples in every age are often quick to panic in the face of the challenges of everyday living. Most of us do not ordinarily have much contact with the sea and the wind, but we are all often buffeted by the concerns of the worlds in which we live. We are wives and mothers, business people and retired persons. We are husbands and fathers, clergy and religious. The seas and the winds that we face are usually stirred up by relationships and employment, contracts and children, ethical challenges and moral dilemmas. The seas and the winds of our work-a-day-world can go from glassy calm to violent storms in a breath's moment. "Doesn't it matter, Jesus, that we might drown!?" Mark's highly excitable disciples are quite aware that they may not always be in control of their environment – something that most of us now realize with greater regularity. But if Jesus is in the boat, then we are safe. If Jesus, even in an apparent disinterested slumber, is with us, then we are saved. The sea and the wind must obey him because he is the Lord of all.

Mark does not mention what actions the disciples might have taken before resorting to calling upon Jesus. They were fishermen after all. They would know how to attempt to steer the boat, to trim the sails, to guide the rudder, to balance the cargo. They would have any number of procedures to employ before they panicked. People of Faith are not helpless and we are obliged to work for lasting peace and justice. We are resourceful individuals with more than a few tricks up our sleeves to confront the problems that we encounter. But having Jesus in the boat is such an assurance. We have many resources to offer society, the church, and our neighbors. But sometimes the difficulties that we face challenge even the most competent souls. Faith is not a substitute for moral courage. Faith is not a placebo for living. Faith is not an excuse for a lack of effort and we are all called to renew the struggle for lasting racial harmony. We must redouble our efforts to pursue justice wherever we encounter injustice. Faith is an act of confidence that Jesus is in the boat of life and therefore we are safe even in the face of the sea and the wind for they must ultimately obey the Lord of all Creation.