

A Letter to My Grandchild About Charleston

Dear sweet, almost-here Grandbaby,

I can't stop thinking about you this morning. Lots of times when I think about you, I imagine your tiny feet and hands and nose, but today I'm dreaming bigger than that. I'm dreaming about your big name—Phineas Brave—and thinking how badly our world needs you.

We are reeling this week because a young white man went into a black church in Charleston and opened fire. Nine beautiful lives were ended by his hatred. Countless family members are today planning funerals instead of summer vacations. It's tragic beyond words.

And yet ... words.

Words are everywhere.

Everyone is talking about why and how and "What In The World is Happening Here?" and I want to scream: *the very same thing that has always happened is happening here!*

I was born into the racial violence of the '60s. You are being born into the racial violence of the new millennium and the best thing you can do for your world is to refuse to rename it anything other than that. Refuse to get caught in the spin that this is isolated or that gunman was mentally ill or this was an attack against Christians and not an attack against black people.

Refuse to let the world tell you this can't change or that we've come as far as we'll ever come to bridging the racial divide, or that being born into a middle class white family in Bend is the very same thing as being born black in

Baltimore. You don't have a responsibility to defend all people because you're white. You have a responsibility because you're *human* and because the God we serve demands it. And, wow Finn, I hate framing any part of your future relationship with God in terms of demands, but there's no softer way to say it and still stay true to the biblical mandate—God demands that we stand with the poor and oppressed. But Christians have been treating it as optional for way too long.

Caring for our brothers and sisters of every skin color is a core value of God Himself and we should be willing to do, pay or say whatever it takes to make sure that every life is given the value and safety it deserves. In order to do that, we're going to have to stop looking away and start asking painful questions. We're going to need to be willing to leave the cheap seats and move right into the messy middle, where statistics tell the story of what it's really like to be black in America. We're going to need to insist that we can do better than this. We can fly better flags than those that keep old wounds festering. We can build better schools in at-risk neighborhoods. We can choose to admit that this is not an African-American problem, it's an *American* problem and it's our job to work towards healing and a whole new level of harmony.

Oh, darling Finn. I'm hopeful today because of you. Because you will come with those incredible little fingers and toes, but you will come bearing the Imago Dei—the image of the God of Justice tattooed on your DNA. You will come brave and ready to love your world into life. *You must*. Because I'm increasingly convinced that the divides that have prevented my generation from meaningful forward motion, will keep us stuck in this spinning, relabeling madness until we die. The only hope for a future of reconciliation is the now-being-raised army of compassionate, courageous culture-makers with names like Greyson, Clara, Ivy, Hattie, Gracie, Laila, Whalen, Ole, Penny, Bear ... and Phineas.

Be brave, little ones. Our future needs you.

With hope,

Granbo