

A Memorial Minute

It is with much regret that our congregation observes the anniversary of one of the truly horrendous events from our county's past. The night of Second Month, 26th, 2020 marks 150 years since the brutal death of Wyatt Outlaw.

On that cold, drizzly night in 1870, a mob of sixty Ku Klux Klansmen forcibly entered Outlaw's Graham home. In the presence of his mother and young son, this mob brutally seized the 50 year-old citizen and town commissioner. Bound hand and foot, Outlaw was then prodded and beaten with clubs to trudge the few hundred feet from his home on North Main Street to the northwest corner of the courthouse square. There, these lawless vigilantes hung him by the neck from an elm tree. The limb they chose pointed toward the courthouse, as yet another symbolic mockery of justice. A placard was hung around the neck of his lifeless body warning his friends and sympathetic neighbors: "Beware ye traitors both white and black." Wyatt's offense was that he was a bi-racial man who was outspoken in his championing the political and civil rights for his fellow freedmen, and for his previous confrontation of Klan nightriders in conduct of his lawful role as town constable.

We choose to observe this sad anniversary as a reminder that though a century and half has passed since this horrific event, many of the passions and animosities that fanned the flames of that time have continued to burn, smoldering about us even now. We charge ourselves to not forget, nor to be merely bystanders now. For sins borne of fear, hate, or violence by others, past or present, should not be condoned by the sin of silence on the part of us, ourselves.

We mark this anniversary not just so that we may remember the injustice, but so we can continue the work towards justice; not just so that we may remember the suffering, but so we can be an agent of healing and reconciliation.

Approved by Spring Monthly Meeting,
Second Month, 16th, 2020