

My Brothers and Sisters in Jesus the Christ,

Lent is a time of preparation and anticipation. This year all of March is Lent, concluding the month with The Three Days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and The Easter Vigil on Saturday night. Originally Lent was a time of intense preparation for baptism at Easter. Folks prepared for life to be **transformed into a new life in Christ**. The preparation is **hope filled** as we contemplate what wonderful things God will accomplish through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. As we anticipate the arrival of new life we look for signs of spring, of new life and new hope. Have you heard birds singing? Have you seen any crocus or daffodils popping up through the ground? My favorite Easter carol is "Now the Green Blade Rises."

*Now the green blade rises from the buried grain.
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain.
Love comes again, that with the dead has been;
Love comes again like wheat arising green.*

Both the melody and words suggest hope, renewal, new life. But the fourth verse reminds us of grief:

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to life again.
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been;
Love is come again like wheat arising green. ELW #379*

While most of us were celebrating shrove Tuesday or Ash Wednesday or Valentine's Day this year, another community confronted the slaughter of holy innocents in Parkland, Florida. Hearts were grieving. On December 28 each year, the church commemorates the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger, who were killed by Herod, who worried that his reign was threatened by the birth of a new king. Our nation has continued to ignore the slaughter of holy innocents since the 1998 Columbine High School massacre. The Sandy Hook tragedy just before Christmas claimed the lives of young holy innocents. This February's images of Parkland are still fresh in our minds. The students are demanding that adults make schools safe for students, parents are crying out how long must we wait, it's been 20 years. When are we going to wake up as a society? No other nation on earth has witnessed the slaughter of holy innocents in schools year after year. The slaughter of holy innocents is not a partisan political issue, it is a national crisis. The Book of Common Prayer offers the following prayer:

We remember today, O God the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil and establish your rule of justice, love and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Our prayer for Good Friday is: Lord Jesus, you carried our sins in your own body on the tree so that we might have life. May we and all who remember this day find **new life** in you now and in the world to come. Amen."

Death is not the final world. Death has been conquered through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That, my friends, is our hope. We are people of hope.

Shalom,

Pastor Bev+