Dear friends,

Renee Good was a Presbyterian. She was the niece of a Presbyterian minister. Last week, she went out to support her neighbors who are being persecuted. She went because Jesus tells us to love our neighbor and to protect the vulnerable. She was living her faith. She could have been any of us. And now she is dead. She was shot because she was where ICE didn't want her to be, and because someone did not see her as human. She was shot because he had a gun and she was defying him. He showed her, didn't he?

The first shock was her murder in cold blood. The second shock was the way so many in the country responded, with justification, with lies, with arguments that don't make any sense in the light of day. We have been here before. We have been here when George Floyd died under the knee of law enforcement while others stood and watched (and later justified). We have been here when police killed Michael Brown, Breonna Taylor, and Philando Castile and so many other times. We have been here too many times, in cases where the outcome should have been different and people should still be alive, but they are not.

Please know that I am not against the police. I have seen our Durham police officers de-escalate potentially dangerous situations. They have come when we have called, and are actively working (with too few officers) to keep Durham safe. The HEART Team does great work helping people with mental illness and addiction get the help they need. But I also know that racism is a reality in all our systems, that many of us carry a racial bias we are not aware of, and that, for white people especially, this requires constant work to name our biases and to actively work against them.

In Renee's case, her death was driven by *political* bias. Too many people are judging one another and acting out of hatred because someone is on a different political side. Our current administration encourages vengeance and violence on a regular basis through his words and actions and his followers are taking this to mean that they can do whatever they want. And so the ICE officer did what he wanted. He shot a woman who dared to be in his way. And she is gone from this world.

In addition to naming and working against racial bias, we need to name and actively work against political bias. We must have conversations where we can (acknowledging that we can't have these conversations safely in some spaces). In *safe* spaces, we can approach people we know with curiosity, seeking to understand what is driving their different opinions and finding places where bridges, even small ones, might be built. What we can't do is demonize the "other." We can't support an "us against them" mentality. That is evil at work to tear us apart. We are called to be bound together in the love that Christ has shown us, to find our kinship with one another, even when that sometimes seems impossible. As scripture tells us, "with God all things are possible." Renee believed that.

At her memorial service, her wife, Rebecca Good, offered a fitting memorial: *"On Wednesday, January 7th, we stopped to support our neighbors. We had whistles. They had guns. We were raising our son to believe that no matter where you come from or what you look like, all of us deserve compassion and kindness. Renee lived this belief every day. She is pure love. She is pure*

joy. She is pure sunshine. Renee was a Christian who knew that all religions teach the same essential truth: we are here to love each other, care for each other, and keep each other safe and whole."

May you find a way to do these things today, with those you know and with those you don't know, those you love and those you find difficult to love, those you agree with and with those who you cannot for the life of you understand. We are here to love each other. Do not let evil in the world sour you from this calling from God. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Bear the light of Christ in the world, in whatever ways you can.
May God's peace be with you and sustain you.
May the light of Christ shine in the darkest places of your life.
May the Holy Spirit guide you as you bear love and light into the world.

"Do not be overcome by evil. Overcome evil with love" (Romans 12:21).

Love to you all,
Mindy