Easter 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

We know Good Friday. It seems we have been living in Good Friday for quite some time now. Death is all around us as the COVID19 pandemic continues, war in Ukraine rages, gun violence claims too many lives in our neighborhoods, relationships are torn apart by political differences, drug overdoses are a reality for too many families, and our loved ones still die from natural causes. We know Good Friday.

This past Sunday, I participated in a walk in Trenton to bear witness to the faith communities' commitment to stand against gun violence and proclaim peace. Participants included people of every faith from the Mercer County area and beyond. Family members of victims of gun violence spoke about their loved ones whose lives were ended much too soon, including the mother of a 15-year-old who was shot dead by a "stray" bullet while she was leaving her grandmother's home. The pain we heard was palpable. The stories left us heartbroken.

And yet, they did not leave us hopeless. We live on the other side of Good Friday – we know the end of the story. The story of Good Friday does not end in defeat and death but rather ends on Easter with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Life is the last word; hope propels us forward in faith, even when it feels like our grief is overwhelming.

This week, we again will witness Jesus' betrayal at the hands of those who followed him most closely, we will watch as he is hung to die as a common criminal, and on Sunday, we will hear the news that changes everything for us – "He is not here, but he has risen."

Because we already know the ending, we can stand in Good Friday and be comforted that even there, in the heart of our deepest pain and sorrow, God is present. We are not left in despair for we are Resurrection people. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed.

The risen Christ, who walks on wounded feet
from garden tomb through darkened city street,
unlocks the door of grief, despair, and fear,
and speaks a word of peace to all who hear.

The risen Christ, who stands with wounded side
breathes out his Spirit on them to abide
whose faith still wavers, who dare not believe;
new grace, new strength, new purpose they receive.

(ELW 390, verses 1-2)

In Easter hope,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew