

We follow Jesus, NOT Herod

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (Jn. 1:5 NRS)

Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:
"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

(Matt. 2:17-18 NRS)

December days darken physically and spiritually. Presbyterian Christians are encouraged to follow the light that shines in the darkness, for nothing will overcome the light.

Yet, many of us are deeply discouraged and horrified at numerous local, state, and national government actions and other tragedies of darkness. This summer Pittsburgh Presbytery received a clarion call from the Eastminster Presbyterian Church's leadership as to how deeply they were troubled and hurt by many horrors. They listed: the local police shooting of Antwon Rose, Jr., in the back, concerns about some police around the country disrespecting and treating young black men brutally, concerns about U.S. culture idolizing violence and guns, concerns about our inhumane immigration policies, including the separation of children from their parents and loved ones at the southern border. They proposed that our Presbytery send their letter to our federal government's elected officials with specific calls for legal and legislative actions. We share their pain and trauma and their desire for legislative actions to bring more light into this darkened world.

Pittsburgh Presbytery also must respond to this deep darkness that currently surrounds us, with even more horrors having happened this fall, such as the two racist murders near a Kentucky grocery store, the eleven hate-motivated murders of worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue, the failure of any significant gun control legislation, the rapid decrease of civility and increase of hate rhetoric, and the fact that we have just experienced the nation's 307th mass shooting this year in Thousand Oaks, California (as of November 9, 2018).

Preparation for Advent and Christmas includes coming to terms with the evil of King Herod in the book of Matthew. We must never skip by this biblical wisdom. In the midst of the story of our Savior's arrival, Herod has infant children slaughtered in his desire to kill the Christ child.

And we learn about deep grieving and incredible mourning when we read from the Holy Scriptures:

Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:
"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

(Matt. 2:17-18 NRS)

Thirty three years later Mary continues Racheal's excruciating suffering at the foot of the cross. The Cross is the primary symbol of divine mercy, healing, and reconciliation, and yet also of deep human evil and sorrow. The Good News of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection victory of Life offering God's real presence with us begins with the Savior's arrival each Advent/Christmas season.

Every Advent and Christmas season we are confronted by both deep evil and profound hope. We see the horrific evil and do not diminish its power and influence. Yet, this is a season in which we are challenged to see more clearly the light of the Gospel. A light of hope, justice, peace, love, and joy are the gifts that Jesus gives. We, as children of God, are the fortunate recipients of that gift – and we are ones called to share it with all others.

We Presbyterians are committed to sharing this light every Christmas season, and it seems even more needed now than ever. And we are committed to seeking renewal through celebrating Christ's birth so that we would follow the ways and teachings and presence of the adult Jesus Christ throughout the year ahead.

We pray that God's mercy will carry you into a grateful and needed welcome of Jesus Christ this 2018 Advent and Christmas Season along with a seeking to follow His lead to work against the actions of darkness.

We follow Jesus, not Herod, and therefore we propose that our national government (and where appropriate, City, Allegheny County, and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania governments):

- (1) do serious federal investigations into police departments and District Attorney offices that have a record of police brutality and racial profiling without appropriate action and accountability;
- (2) establish stricter gun control laws;
- (3) develop a policy for humane treatment of asylum seekers from other countries, which would include not separating families and also a reasonable time limit for an asylum hearing to occur;
- (4) encourage love, civility, unity, and peacemaking in political and public discourse with an appreciation of people's differences and differing viewpoints within our diverse, pluralistic country and communities, with an emphatic repudiation of hate, hate speech, and bullying;

We also propose that all our Churches and members pray to our Almighty God about these things and also do more to work to end racism in our area, with more donations to and actions in our Presbytery's Freedom Rising project, and more personal involvement with people in all our realms of living, using and affirming the anti-racism transformational work offered by our Presbytery.

We also propose that the Presbytery send this entire statement along with Eastminster's July letter to: all our Presbytery's Churches; the President of the U.S.A., our area's current and newly elected representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives, our state's two U.S. Senators, our area's PA state senators and legislators, our Pittsburgh Mayor and City Council members, our Allegheny County executive, as well as media Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, the New Pittsburgh Courier, Pittsburgh Current, In Pittsburgh, WESA FM Radio station, and Pittsburgh's KDKA, WTAE, and WPXI TV stations.