

It's been a Long, Hard, Sad Week
Feast of the Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-13
February 19, 2023 *
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Come Holy Spirit and Enkindle within us the fire of your burning Love. Amen.

There are text led sermons and there are life led sermons. This is the latter.

It's been a long, hard, sad week. The uniquely American deaths of Arielle Anderson, Brian Fraser, and Alexandria Verner have ripped ragged holes in their families. Holes that cannot even begin to be filled by our thoughts and prayers. The week before, with far less press, on Saturday the 7th, a couple also in their twenties were found dead in their home in Taylor, MI. Apparently, the young man shot the woman, his girlfriend and then shot himself.

Make no mistake, ready access to guns in the United States of America, is a prime contributor to completely and utterly unnecessary deaths in our communities. Deaths we know about and deaths we may not. I am sick of death. I am sick of violent death caused by guns. In the United States and in the state of Michigan the leading cause of accidental death for our children are guns. We know that Black Americans are ten times more likely to die in gun homicides than white Americans (Center for American progress <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/gun-violence-disproportionately-and-overwhelmingly-hurts-communities-of-color/>) We know Wayne county ranks as one of the Urban counties in our country with one of the highest firearm homicide rate, (<https://efsgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/community-gun-violence/>). We know that suicide rates in the rural reaches of our state is now twice the state average, with guns being the most common and effective way to end someone's life. (<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/suicide-stalks-rural-michigan>) We know all of this.

We know that several young people at MSU have now lived through their second mass shooting at a school they have attended.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/14/us/michigan-state-shooting-students-gun-violence.html>)

Only in America.

Dr. Patrick Carter, co-director of the University of Michigan Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, said, "In the most recent years, we've seen the highest absolute number of firearm deaths that we've ever seen."

Is this the country in which we want to live?

Is this the state we want to inhabit?

Am I mad. Yes.

Am I being political.

No. I'm being human.

I'm being Christian.

I am embracing the values of Jesus Christ, who said,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." "Love one another as I have loved you."

"Love your enemies." "There is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends." "If anyone causes a young person to stumble..."

The God we follow, calls every one of us to do all we can to care for others, even at personal cost. So, my friends, what are you personally going to do to end the scourge of gun violence in our country? I am looking at you. What are you going to do? I am looking in the mirror at me. What am I going to do? Might working on this be your Lenten discipline?

Every time I wonder if I am spending too much time on End Gun Violence Michigan (<https://www.migunsafety.org>), the plague of gun violence moves one step closer. In my episcopate we have had a mass shooting in a high school in our diocese, we have witnessed a mass shooting at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Alabama, our general convention deputation had a man shot and killed outside the hotel we were staying at while we were in Baltimore, we all looked on in horror as an elementary school in Texas was shot up killing 19 children and two adults all children of God, and now three young people killed and five critically wounded at Michigan State University. The shooting at MSU occurred on the eve of the 5th anniversary of the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting. (I can only imagine how close to home a shooting at MSU, feels here in Ann Arbor.)

Jesus said, I came that you might have life and life in abundance. (John 10) It's time for us as people of faith and people of good will to rearrange our lives to ensure that we change our laws in the state of Michigan. This is our first step. This past Thursday, three days after the young people at MSU died, bills calling for changes to our state gun laws were introduced. Sensible changes like: Mandatory Universal background checks for all firearms, (the MSU shooter legally purchased his guns) Safe storage laws for guns and Extreme risk Protection orders.

These bills have been introduced, like they have for the last ten years, but this time they will receive hearings and votes. This time they will not be stopped by cowardly politicians. My question, my ask is: Will you rearrange your personal schedules to attend these hearings? Will you call your legislators and tell them to vote yes, will you talk to your friends who live in other parts of the state and ask them to call their legislators? Will you join me on the steps of the State Capital with former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords on Wednesday March 15th, to show your solidarity and support?

Will you join with me in showing the gun companies and the gun lobbyists, that the people of our state matter more than their profits. Will you join with me in insisting that our elected officials stop obeying the NRA, fearing for their political futures and instead demand that they listen to us, *We, the People*.

This is my ask. This is my hope. This is my prayer. Let us make these sensible changes together.

Amen.

Spartans Will...