

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | February 16, 2018

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." -Mark 1: 9-15

This text in the beginning of Mark's gospel identifies aspects of Jesus's journey and highlights our life in Christ, following a [path](#) from identity to reflection to task. Life begins with baptism, being rooted in God's proclamation that we are beloved children of God. Life involves struggling with evil "wild beasts" of the world and within ourselves. And this struggle calls us into a life of service, to challenge injustices and evil in the world.

The Rev. Bill Loader from the Uniting Church in Australia [writes](#), "There is a danger in seeing any one of the three aspects of the passage in isolation. Being, without engaging the issues, is remote and might evoke adoration from others but has little point. Struggling, without a sense of identity in being and doing becomes floundering. Doing, without being and struggling with the underlying issues, becomes activism."

Our advocacy is a deeply spiritual practice, requiring reflection and prayer. We are grounded in our baptism and God's love for the world, aware that this ministry is a struggle against the evils of greed, power, and sin. And it is a life in community -- we cannot go it alone, without siblings in Christ, partners in action, and the Holy Spirit working with and through us.

This week we cannot escape the gun violence that we witnessed in Parkland, Florida. It certainly feels like the wilderness part of our journey. Resources for your communities to lament together can be found [here](#). A sample liturgy for a vigil response to violence can be found [here](#).

Yet, the work of creating safer communities for all of our neighbors does continue in the midst of tragedy. Only a day before this latest terrible mass shooting, Governor Phil Murphy and Assembly Majority Leader Lou Greenwald hosted a [roundtable](#) to discuss gun violence prevention in New Jersey. Through conversation, we agreed upon these priorities:

- Critical magazine capacity laws
- Protecting our handgun carry regulations
- Prohibiting the possession of armor-piercing ammunition
- Making us a leader in adoption of smart gun technology and sales
- Undertaking a statewide study of gun violence as a public health matter

Bill numbers and additional details will be clarified over the next few weeks and we will keep you informed as this work continues to take shape. However, we must also find ways to work in conjunction with other states in our region. Last year, there were forty-two shootings in New Jersey sourced to a single Ohio gun dealer. There is also a well-known gun trafficking route that originates in the South and travels up the I-95 corridor into New Jersey and New York. To accomplish this interstate change, we will need to urge our representatives and senators in Washington, DC to strengthen interstate commerce laws. There is much action ahead.

This week, spend time in your communities praying together, reminding one another that in baptism we are called to the work of Christ and are provided with a community in which to struggle, discern, and act. For an additional reflection, see Bishop's Beckwith's writing [here](#).