

Sermon after the killing of Renee Nicole Good
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Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
January 11, 2026

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SCRIPTURE READINGS

Today we have two Gospel texts. The first is normally included in worship the Sunday following Christmas - but it actually continues the Epiphany story we heard last week. It is a difficult text - but the events it describes feel relevant to this moment, so Pastor Reebee has included it today.

Matthew 2:13-23

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. **17** Then what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18

“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.”

19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, **20** “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” **21** Then Joseph[d] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. **23** There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Our second Gospel text is the one in today’s lectionary. We’ve jumped ahead a few years - Jesus is grown up. Hear now the story of Jesus’ Baptism as recorded in Matthew.

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. **17** And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,[e] with whom I am well pleased.”

Two weeks ago, thinking of today’s service, I chose to bring the lectionary Gospel for December 28 into our worship because this is a year we cannot skip this part of the Christmas story. This year, this story is the headline of our current lives.

The gospel records that as a tiny child, Jesus and his family were targeted by an oppressive regime. And the miracle of the Christmas story is that Joseph,

warned in a dream,

which maybe sounded like a neighbor blowing into a loud orange whistle,

managed to scoop up Mary and the baby and hop on their donkey and seek safety in another country, and so the story of the Christ child could unfold, thank God.

But that leaves Rachel, weeping for her children.

Because Jesus escaped, but Herod came after all the babies in that town.
Children. Babies under two.

Most years we skip this part of the Bible, because it is a text of terror,
enough to keep us awake at night.

And then it becomes our headline, it becomes our shared experience, and
we cannot skip this text any more.

A friend of mine is watching, less than five miles from here, because ICE is
in his neighborhood, and his neighbors have huddled with their children
behind locked doors. Rachel weeps.

Every time I stand outside the ICE building in Burlington, I see families,
babies in arms, go into the ICE facility and some come out and some do
not. Rachel weeps.

School enrollment is down in some communities of color because parents
worry for their children. Minneapolis cancelled school this week after
students and teachers were hit by chemical irritants at Roosevelt High.¹
Rachel weeps.

And if I stood in this pulpit today and did not say her name, did not say:
Rest in Power, Renee Nicole Good - I would not be of any account to you.

Renee Nicole Good, who died a ten minute walk from where George Floyd
died five years ago. Rachel weeps.

But it is not enough to say her name, without also saying:
Genry Ruiz Guillén

¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/minneapolis-public-schools-cancels-classes-activities-for-thursday-and-friday/ar-AA1TMQi7>

Serawit Gezahegn Dejene

Maksym Chernyak

Among the 32 people who died in ICE custody in the last year.²

It is not enough to remember Renee Nicole Good, to say her name, without saying

Silverio Villegas González

and

Keith Porter,

also shot and killed by ICE officers in recent months.³

This is what we do, as people of faith: we grieve the dead. We grieve with families whose loved ones have been torn away. We say their names. We do not look away. Our hearts break from love for our neighbors. Today, we grieve with Becca Good, who lost her wife Renee. We weep with Becca, and with Renee's children. We weep with the mothers and parents of all the lost,

Rachels, every one.

We weep with the Rachels of this moment - and I believe that God is weeping, too. God is weeping for Her beloved children.

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Because the words of our UCC leaders are important to share in moments like these, I want to read part of what the Minnesota conference minister

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/jan/04/ice-2025-deaths-timeline> , <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/23/nx-s1-5538090/ice-detention-custody-immigration-arrest-enforcement-dhs-trump>

³ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/full-list-of-ice-shootings-since-donald-trump-took-office/ar-AA1TMi4f>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_shootings_by_U.S._immigration_agents_in_the_second_Trump_administration , <https://www.npr.org/2025/10/23/nx-s1-5538090/ice-detention-custody-immigration-arrest-enforcement-dhs-trump>

Rev. Dr. Tanya Sadagopan posted after visiting the site of Renee Good's death:⁴

...As we mourn this loss of a 37-year-old woman, who could have been you or me or any one of our clergy who respond to the call for witnesses when ICE is in the area, we also confront how empire still oppresses God's people by wielding violence and death.

The Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ finds reprehensible the actions of ICE today. Jeremiah says, "They committed abomination, yet they were not ashamed." Even as we stand in the aftermath of their shame, we are undeterred. We renounce their culture of cruelty. We believe in the teachings of Jesus who holds the love of God and the love of neighbor above all other commandments. We honor the good that Renee Good was doing on this fateful day. She stood for the good in people.

What are we to do? We must do our part large and small to stand for decency and to follow in the ways of Christ.

**We will hold fast to love in places where hate invades.
We will hold fast to compassion when cruelty reigns.
We will hold fast to justice when power flaunts violence.**

... Our redemption lies in our work to faithfully and humbly love our neighbor on every corner.

Renee Good was her name, at the crossroads of 34th and Portland.

Pilgrim, reading all of Matthew 2, today, means that we don't skip the hard parts. In reading the slaughter of the innocents we realize that we have

⁴ <https://www.uccmn.org/2026/01/07/peace-peace-there-is-no-peace-in-minneapolis/>

been here before. It's important to hear the stories, to remember the lament and learn the minor-key tune that is part of our shared story. To remember that we have ancestors in faith who were here before. That may not be good news, or easy to read, but it does help, because from our past we do learn. We learn to recognize Herod. We learn.

I would like to just vent and lament. Look how bad everything is, and here's Herod, again, and we can't stop Herod. I would like to take my whole 15 minutes to rant, to vent, to lament, to cry out.

I have been listening to so many of you, to members of this community, lamenting.

But this is not all we do, as Christians.

I also stand in this pulpit today to say: weeping and lament are *only one part of our faith*, this hour, this day, this year. And learning from the past must lead to wisdom and courage for the present.

We can spend our days in turmoil and in fear like the worker who buried the coin for fear of his master, we can stay in the place of weeping and lament for our world and our neighbors, like Psalm 22, *we can stay in that grief*.

Or, we can come to the moment when we ask: what shall we do? And really, what we do as people of faith is the same today as last week, and last year. So here's the toolkit and the call to action.

First: *We stay true to our faith. Our faith at its most basic means loving God and loving our neighbors. Which means seeing our neighbors, every one of them as beloved children of God. Worthy of dignity. Worthy of respect. Worthy of compassion. Worthy of due process, and basic human rights, to put it in legal terms. Worthy of life.

I was talking to my cousin Ron about this sermon. Some of y'all know Ron. He said, you've got to quote Eleanor Roosevelt. Well Ron, here's what

Eleanor Roosevelt said: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Also: *We love our neighbors. We love *even those* who have done harm, and we believe that they may one day seek redemption. We love them as human beings even as we cry out against the harm they’ve done, even as we pray for them to change, even as we work to change the system so they can’t do more harm.

And: *We pray. And I don’t mean that flippantly, I mean we pray, Because praying together means we are together.

Because praying moves mountains.

Because praying means that we believe in the possibility of a future with hope.

Because in prayer, in dreams, in meditation, in reflection
- even in the most difficult times

God offers guidance, courage, wisdom, strength.

In our second text today, Jesus goes to the Jordan to get closer to God.

And God offers love, affirmation, confirmation, and direction to Jesus.

When we pray, we open ourselves to these same possibilities. Because prayer aligns us with God’s will.

And - and here is the call to action - *We live out our values. Tenderly, carefully, peacefully, cautiously, determinedly, we live out our values. We claim and proclaim that every single human being is a beloved child of God, worthy of dignity. We show up, speak out, stand up for our neighbors. We do our best to stay safe while doing it, but ***we live out our values.***

And - *We practice nonviolence. I’m going to talk more about that next week, as we remember Rev. Dr. King.

And - *We take courage as we act. The hymn we're going to sing next calls out to God: grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the facing of this hour. These are fearful times but we take courage and we work for the turning of the tide.

Many of you have been doing this, and please keep on if you can, if it is safe for you to do so. Thirteen Pilgrims, to date, have been at the Burlington ICE Bearing Witness gatherings.

But maybe you're not one to show up with a poster. Or maybe protests and vigils feel daunting right now for any of us. But you're a human being, and a Christian, and our neighbors are being treated with cruelty, their humanity discarded, and you might not make it to a vigil or a rally but there are places and ways you can speak. To elected officials, and with your wallet, and with your art, and with your time and with your friends, and yesterday at Depot Square and practically every day of the week outside the Burlington ICE facility, and if not there - *somewhere, somehow*. Because now's the time, and it's past time, and it can't keep happening in our name, and we cannot resign ourselves.

I'm not a frequent reader of the National Catholic Reporter, but Friday their editorial included something essential: "Authoritarianism thrives not only on force, but on resignation."⁵

Pilgrims, *We do not give in to despair or resignation.

The Christian faith says there is always another chapter to come. We are part of writing that next chapter. In the UCC, we say: do not put a period where God puts a comma. Today we remember someone who died in the midst of a nonviolent effort to warn her neighbors that Herod was on the way. We all have a part in the next chapter. So we keep on.

⁵ <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/editorial/editorial-we-are-moral-exile-we-must-resist>

And the words of Becca Good about her wife Renee Nicole Good offer more guidance, so I'll close with them.

“Renee lived by an overarching belief: there is kindness in the world and we need to do everything we can to find it where it resides and nurture it where it needs to grow. 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...

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.

On Wednesday, January 7th, we stopped to support our neighbors.

We had whistles. They had guns.

Renee leaves behind three extraordinary children; the youngest is just six years old and already lost his father. I am now left to raise our son and to continue teaching him, as Renee believed, that there are people building a better world for him. That the people who did this had fear and anger in their hearts, and we need to show them a better way.

We thank you for the privacy you are granting our family as we grieve. We thank you for ensuring that Renee's legacy is one of kindness and love. We honor her memory by living her values: rejecting hate and choosing compassion, turning away from fear and pursuing peace, refusing division and knowing we must come together to build a world where we all come home safe to the people we love.”⁶

May it be so. Amen.

Full text:

⁶ <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2026/01/09/renee-goods-wife-releases-statement-about-ice-shooting>

On Wednesday, Renee Macklin Good was fatally shot by a federal ICE agent. Becca Good, her wife, shared the following statement with MPR News. *Full statement below.*

“First, I want to extend my gratitude to all the people who have reached out from across the country and around the world to support our family.

This kindness of strangers is the most fitting tribute because if you ever encountered my wife, Renee Nicole Macklin Good, you know that above all else, she was kind. In fact, kindness radiated out of her.

Renee sparkled. She literally sparkled. I mean, she didn’t wear glitter but I swear she had sparkles coming out of her pores. All the time. You might think it was just my love talking but her family said the same thing. Renee was made of sunshine.

Renee lived by an overarching belief: there is kindness in the world and we need to do everything we can to find it where it resides and nurture it where it needs to grow. 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.

Like people have done across place and time, we moved to make a better life for ourselves. We chose Minnesota to make our home. Our whole extended road trip here, we held hands in the car while our son drew all over the windows to pass the time and the miles.

What we found when we got here was a vibrant and welcoming community, we made friends and spread joy. And while any place we were together was home, there was a strong shared sense here in Minneapolis that we were looking out for each other. Here, I had finally found peace and safe harbor. That has been taken from me forever.

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.

On Wednesday, January 7th, we stopped to support our neighbors. We had whistles. They had guns.

Renee leaves behind three extraordinary children; the youngest is just six years old and already lost his father. I am now left to raise our son and to continue teaching him, as Renee believed, that there are people building a better world for him. That the people who did this had fear and anger in their hearts, and we need to show them a better way.

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⁷ <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2026/01/09/renee-goods-wife-releases-statement-about-ice-shooting>

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There were so many quotes I wanted to include in my sermon today. I am including below some that I did not have time to read aloud.

The following poem was shared by Rev. Cynthia Good at the Arlington interfaith vigil on Friday evening:

The Low Road

by Marge Piercy

What can they do
to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can
bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can
take your child, wall up
your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them
from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake-dancing file
can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again and they said no,
it starts when you say *We*
and know who you mean,
and each day you mean one more.⁸

⁸ <https://mondaypoem.blogspot.com/2010/11/low-road-by-marge-piercy.html>

Today, we grieve.

We know that a woman was killed on Wednesday in Minneapolis during an encounter involving federal immigration enforcement.; The loss of life—any loss of life—demands our moral attention.

From our shared Abrahamic faith traditions, we affirm that every human being bears the image of God. No one in our state should go about their day fearing detention, arrest, or physical harm. Fear is not safety, and violence is not the path to peace.

This moment calls leaders beyond partisan politics and toward our common humanity. Actions that terrorize communities are unwarranted, destructive, and deeply polarizing.

Some dismiss prayer as passive. People of faith know better. Prayer is how we resist hatred, division, and violence. Prayer is how we call forth justice, compassion, and courage.

We call for a statewide focus of prayer—in churches, mosques, synagogues, and sacred spaces—for peace, for the safety of our neighbors, and for the family of the woman killed today.

May we choose a better way. Together.

—Elder Suzanne Kelly
CEO, Minnesota Council of Churches

Heather Cox Richardson, Letters from an American, January 9. 2026, via Email:

“Beginning in 1943, the War Department published a series of pamphlets for U.S. Army personnel in the European theater of World War II. Titled Army Talks, the series was designed “to help [the personnel] become better-informed men and women and therefore better soldiers.”

On March 24, 1945, the topic for the week was “FASCISM!”

“You are away from home, separated from your families, no longer at a civilian job or at school and many of you are risking your very lives,” the pamphlet explained, “because of a thing called fascism.” But, the publication asked, what is fascism? “Fascism is not the easiest thing to identify and analyze,” it said, “nor, once in power, is it easy to destroy. It is important for our future and that of the world that as many of us as possible understand the causes and practices of fascism, in order to combat it.”

Fascism, the U.S. government document explained, “is government by the few and for the few. The objective is seizure and control of the economic, political, social, and cultural life of the state.” “The people run democratic governments, but fascist governments run the people.”

“The basic principles of democracy stand in the way of their desires; hence—democracy must go! Anyone who is not a member of their inner gang has to do what he’s told. They permit no civil liberties, no equality before the law.”

“Fascism treats women as mere breeders. ‘Children, kitchen, and the church,’ was the Nazi slogan for women,” the pamphlet said.

Fascists “make their own rules and change them when they choose.... They maintain themselves in power by use of force combined with propaganda based on primitive ideas of ‘blood’ and ‘race,’ by skillful manipulation of fear and hate, and by false promise of security. The propaganda glorifies war and insists it is smart and ‘realistic’ to be pitiless and violent.”

Fascists understood that “the fundamental principle of democracy—faith in the common sense of the common people—was the direct opposite of the fascist principle of rule by the elite few,” it explained, “[s]o they fought democracy.... They played political, religious, social, and economic groups against each other and seized power while these groups struggled.”

Americans should not be fooled into thinking that fascism could not come to America, the pamphlet warned; after all, “[w]e once laughed Hitler off as a harmless little clown with a funny mustache.” And indeed, the U.S. had experienced “sorry instances of mob sadism, lynchings, vigilantism, terror, and suppression of civil liberties. We have had our hooded gangs, Black Legions, Silver Shirts, and racial and religious bigots. All of them, in the name of Americanism, have used undemocratic methods and doctrines which...can be properly identified as ‘fascist.’”

The War Department thought it was important for Americans to understand the tactics fascists would use to take power in the United States. They would try to gain power “under the guise of ‘super-patriotism’ and ‘super-Americanism.’” And they would use three techniques:

First, they would pit religious, racial, and economic groups against one another to break down national unity. Part of that effort to divide and conquer would be a “well-planned ‘hate campaign’ against minority races, religions, and other groups.”

Second, they would deny any need for international cooperation, because that would fly in the face of their insistence that their supporters were better than everyone else. “In place of international cooperation, the fascists seek to substitute a perverted sort of ultra-nationalism which tells their people that they are the only people in the world who count. With this goes hatred and suspicion toward the people of all other nations.”

Third, fascists would insist that “the world has but two choices—either fascism or communism, and they label as ‘communists’ everyone who refuses to support them.”

It is “vitally important” to learn to spot native fascists, the government said, “even though they adopt names and slogans with popular appeal, drape themselves with the American flag, and attempt to carry out their program in the name of the democracy they are trying to destroy.”

The only way to stop the rise of fascism in the United States, the document said, “is by making our democracy work and by actively cooperating to preserve world peace and security.” In the midst of the insecurity of the modern world, the hatred at the root of fascism “fulfills a triple mission.” By dividing people, it weakens democracy. “By getting men to hate rather than to think,” it prevents them “from

seeking the real cause and a democratic solution to the problem.” By falsely promising prosperity, it lures people to embrace its security.

“Fascism thrives on indifference and ignorance,” it warned. Freedom requires “being alert and on guard against the infringement not only of our own freedom but the freedom of every American. If we permit discrimination, prejudice, or hate to rob anyone of his democratic rights, our own freedom and all democracy is threatened.”

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Notes:

<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=armytalks>

War Department, “Army Talk 64: FASCISM!” March 24, 1945, at

<https://archive.org/details/ArmyTalkOrientationFactSheet64-Fascism/mode/2up>“

“Into this world, this demented inn,
in which there is absolutely no room for him at all,
Christ has come uninvited.

But because he cannot be at home in it - because he is out of place in it,
and yet must be in it - his place is with those others who do not belong,
who are rejected because they are regarded as weak;
and with those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons,
and are tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room,
Christ is present in this world.

He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be

nothing but the world at its worst. For them,
there is no escape even in imagination.
They cannot identify with the power structure of a crowded humanity
which seeks to project itself outward, anywhere, in a centrifugal flight
into the void, to get out there where there is no God, no man, no name, no
identity,
no weight, no self, nothing but the bright, self-directed, perfectly obedient
and infinitely expensive machine.”⁹

From Thomas Merton’s 1965 essay, “The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room.”

⁹ Thomas Merton, “The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room” in *Raids on the Unspeakable*, pages 51-52 1965.