

A HOLY SEASON

Advent is a holy time, a time of reflection and anticipation as we await the gift of the Christ child. We listen to the Christmas music and recall times of joy and laughter. And yet, a young person not yet a man, has marred this time. The families of his victims will forever be in grief at this time of year. My brother died on my 12th birthday, I never received a gift, a cake, or a greeting for my birthday from my parents after that. Their grief was renewed each year on my birthday. It was not until 6 years later that a woman I baby sat for gave me a party with cake and invited my friends to attend and then again 4 years later that friend made sure I celebrated and had a cake. These people helped me to move on and to celebrate that I was living and still grieve for what was lost. My brother died of a disease not by the hand of a troubled youth with a gun purchased as an "early Christmas present." How much more senseless and painful is that? Children bright and hopeful with promise have been taken. Families and loved ones will seek justice but no matter the outcome there is no justice for what has been lost. Ask the parents of Sandyhook, or Columbine, or Parkland, or a theater in Aurora or any of the other places where there has been a mass shooting. There is no sense in the senseless, there is no relief for the pain of this loss. A few days before his death, my father spoke of his grief, his "should have done," in the deaths of my brothers. It had been over 40 years since my first brother died and 8 years since the second brother died and his grief at their loss was still present and raw. He lost a part of himself. I will keep the families and loved ones in my prayers that their pain will be eased, that they will be comforted, that memories will help sustain them, that they will be united one day, and that they will feel the comfort of God in their lives and that they know a loving God weeps with them. May God be with them in their sorrow.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Lord, be with those who are grieving the loss of young lives. Comfort them, give them peace and strength for the days and years ahead. Be with the survivors, may they gain strength and peace from your love and from each other. We ask Lord for your healing upon them. Be with our church, may we be a haven for those that seek you. Empower us to do your will, give us strength and focus to be better, to do more, to answer the needs of the community. Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry, watch over him and his family. Be with our staff and leaders bless them, protect them, and guide them. We thank you Lord for the blessings of each day and your love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Grace Epperson