"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me!” This passage is from Matthew 23:37 but I think it does give us a feel for the garment of sorrow and affliction referred to in the reading from Baruch. Here we find the chosen people removed from their holy land and the place where they know God is present. It can be hard to see God’s presence when one is in a place that is not familiar, where one feels lost, and where the people around you do not know this God. It can be hard to practice and live out our call to follow God in a place where we are held prisoner either literally or because we are being held against are will; like the thousands of refugees waiting to cross our border. It is hard to follow our call to follow God when everything around us screams of different values, focuses on different goals. It is hard to follow our call to God when our own sinfulness separates us from relationship with God and one another. The readings today speak of a God who is able to point us in a new direction to a new way of living if we are but willing to participate and acknowledge God’s constant presence and guidance in our lives. When we try to confine God to a specific location, when we take this reading literally and think God is only in Jerusalem or only in Brown County, we can be led astray. We are surely led astray when we say that God can only be found in one place with one group of people. God the creator of all is present with all peoples and places. Sometimes we like the Israelites may feel distraught over the state of the world, we may turn to unhealthy ways of coping with the challenges before us whether they be physical, emotional or social. Hearing about yet another school shooting, this time in my home state of Michigan, and reading posts from my cousins who fear for the lives of their children makes me distraught, concerned and wondering about where God was for that boy who thought this was the right course of action. We now know his parents did nothing to assist him when he was clearly deeply troubled. Where was God for the four children killed and the 7 injured? Why did this student have access to a gun and why did his parents think this was an appropriate Christmas present. There are so many questions to be asked whenever tragedy strikes; but by now we know that we live in a society that values are right to own a lethal weapon more than our right to live without the threat of being murdered. We live in a society that values white lives more than the lives of those whose skin is black, brown, yellow or any of the many beautiful shades of humanity. Bonnie Perry newly elected bishop of Michigan wrote a beautiful tribute based on our readings this week to these students and teachers that have been traumatized and she also gives us a call to action, here is part of her statement: I need these weapons for what purpose? To keep me safe? From people or from my debilitating sense of insecurity, my endless fears that I am not good enough or strong enough. Holding the gun, sliding mechanisms of steel, that fire projectiles of lead into living, breathing human beings does that vision give me hope? Does the imagined, envisioned death of someone with whom I am mad, someone who made me feel small, does that fantasy of their blood on the floor does it calm my nerves in this fragile, fraught world?

We grieve now, but soon we must act. Am I being political? Do you think my anger is showing? Do you think I am going too far?

Friends, those young people are no longer breathing. Will you join with me, all of us, together, soon, acting? Please let us do this.

The day of judgement draws near…There is a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord…

I seek sensible gun laws. I seek smart technology that relies on biometrics to prevent someone from firing a gun they do not own. I support hunters, hunting and safe ownership of hunting rifles. I support universal background checks. And I seek the elimination of automatic handguns and rifles.

I seek a world, I seek a place where our young people are safe. You cannot use what you do not have. I seek a world where guns are not commonplace. Join me. For…

Every valley shall be filled, every mountain laid low,

The crooked made straight,

The rough ways made smooth and ALL flesh,

All Flesh, all of our children, shall see the salvation of God.

We grieve now, and soon we prepare the way for our Lord.

So as we prepare ourselves during this season of Advent. During this week of remembering the peace that comes from knowing God we have so much work to do as a society and as individuals but we have so much promise, love and hope to draw from and to gather within ourselves and our community. Paul speaks so fondly of his community in Philipi. He knows that through them the work of God continues even as he is confined to prison. It is not just up to one man to do this work it is up to the community of believers. That is how we have made it from the time of Baruch to the present. It is through you that I know God’s work continues and I am so grateful to be your priest. God does send us leaders to encourage his work in the world. We can see that in our gospel readings As we prepare for the birth of Christ we may we may realize that things are not yet how we know they should be. When we live in a world where gun violence is accepted even when it is the lives of our children that are taken we need to grieve and then throw off the sorrow and affliction and take action. John the Baptist understands this fully. He understands that we must repent of our sinfulness of not caring for those that are troubled, allowing guns to be openly accepted by society, allowing the sins of racism, participating in climate change all of which have taken precedence over the relationship we have with God. John rejects all the norms of his culture, his dress, his food, everything about him speaks of another way of living. He sees his purpose solely as pointing the way to God. He knows the path to doing so is to turn away from that which separates us from the challenging work of following God’s ways instead of societies distractions from the truth and peace which God offers. John prepares us for the coming of Jesus this year and every year and the reminder that Jesus is with us. John also reminds us of the words of Isaiah that the Lord has made the path straight and the preparation has been made for all flesh to see the salvation of God. And for that we say, Thanks be to God.