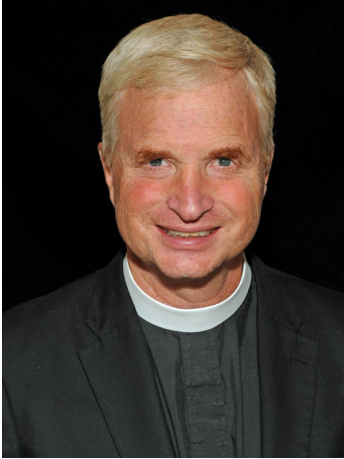




St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben

Sept. 28, 2025



From the Rector

Do you remember how, in 2006, after a shooter killed 10 Amish girls in a school, the Amish community forgave the shooter and comforted his family? Last Sunday Erika Kirk's speech at Charlie Kirk's funeral was an Amish moment. Like them, she dug deep into her faith, followed the example of her savior, and forgave the man who killed her husband. I was deeply moved by her words. With the exception of some antiquated views on the roles of men and women in marriage, I agreed with what she said. No matter what our differences, violence is never the answer. No one deserves to die. Christianity is about love, not hate.

As I listened to her talk, I was moved to tears by her grief, warmed by the stories of the love she and Charlie shared, and impressed by her faith and the faith she described in him. As she spoke, her pain became my pain, and her prayers became my prayers. Like her I pray for a revival instead of a revolution: a revival based on Jesus who commanded us to not just love our neighbor but to love our enemies and forgive them as well. I had never heard of Charlie Kirk a week ago and found myself impressed by his passion, his desire to engage in dialogue, and in particular his ability to reach young men (something the mainline churches have struggled to do).

I have trouble matching all that with a movement that says that the civil rights movement and Civil Rights Act were mistakes and that my black friends and members of my parish are deficient because of the color of their skin, that the 19th Amendment and women's suffrage were mistakes and that my female friends and members of my parish should be content staying at home and raising kids, that my gay friends and members of my parish deserve to be stoned to death, and that homeless people deserved to be killed. Coming from an academic family, I repudiate those who reject intellectual rigor, who before a debate on campus publish lists of professors to harass and intimidate, who ignore science and the overwhelming consensus on things like climate change and vaccines, and who argue for prayer in school but would not be comfortable letting my Islamic, Jewish or Liberal Christian clergy colleagues come through the door. My heart breaks for thousands who have been manipulated into following a Christian nationalism that doesn't resemble Christianity at all.

Like Erika Kirk, I pray for a revival, not a revolution. Like her I pray to God that “thy will be done, thy kingdom come.” Like her, I hope that Charlie’s death will inspire people to open their bibles, go back to church, and open their hearts. When they do that, I pray that they will discover the real Jesus: the Jesus who brought healing and peace, who taught us to reach across differences, to welcome the stranger, to love our neighbors, to love our enemies, and to forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven. On Sunday, Erika Kirk had the faith and courage to stand up and model these things. May we have the courage and faith to do the same. *-Father Ben*

On Praying for Charlie Kirk

This week several people shared their thoughts about whether or not I should have included Charlie Kirk last Sunday. (I thank those who spoke to me in person and encourage others to do the same. If it is helpful I would be happy to do so in the presence of one of the Wardens or a vestry member. Note that I do not typically read or respond to anonymous letters.)

As conveyed in the above cover letter, until a week ago I had never heard of Charlie Kirk. My thought was to rise above the political lines drawn around his death by praying for “all victims of gun violence and their families,” much in the way we had done for Former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, and for what seems to be a continually growing list of other victims of gun violence around our country. Praying “for the end of “all forms of hate,” for “all the troubled areas of the world” or even “for all people on our prayer list” is done for expediency, never to diminish or deny the importance of any specific issues, places, people or events.

I do understand that in this case an action meant to feel inclusive was perceived as the opposite and that for some not specifically naming Charlie Kirk felt like a political statement and a personal slight. That was not intended. I apologize.

Whether you agreed with him or not, Charlie Kirk was a child of God, a husband and a father. He and Speaker Hortman, along with the unnamed victims of this week’s shootings, will be included in the prayers of the people this week. As I hope you picked up from my sermon last week and my cover letter above, I condemn all forms of violence. As much as I may fall short, I strive to follow the way of Jesus and will continue encourage others to do the same. My prayer is that the hopes and the prayers following this tragedy will lead to action, the building of bridges, and work to end of gun violence once and for all. As our Mission Statement so well proclaims, all are welcome here. Thank you for your understanding and willingness to walk through these challenging times together.