



WCPC

Friday, December 16, 2022

Blue Christmas Service

We are told to have a Holly-Jolly Christmas. After all, it is the most wonderful time of the year and the hap-happiest season of all. And yet, we are often overwhelmed by our pain and grief, loss and longing during this season. This time of year, we miss our lost loved ones severely. We feel the family brokenness more acutely. Our loneliness is experienced more immensely. And our addictions often grab us more intensely. Christians believe that while our grief runs deep, our joy and hope run deeper. Still, we can't always expect our hope and joy to catch up to the candy canes and cocoa of Christmas. We need a safe space and reflective place to bring our pain and sorrow to God. This Blue Christmas Service is that opportunity.

In this hour, you are invited into music, prayers, silence, reflection, and an opportunity to write a letter (which I'll say more about). Feel free to participate to your level of comfort—not much or entirely—up to you! You are also invited to linger an additional hour should you need more time.

May you find God's tender mercy and abiding presence during this time. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: How Long, O Lord?

All: Where are you, Lord?

Leader: How Long, O Lord?

All: Where are you, Lord?

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

CALL AND RESPONSE

Leader: For you, O God, our souls in silence wait.

All: Truly our hope is in you.

Leader (from Isaiah 40): God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts are broken and our voices tremble with grief and sorrow. Comfort, comfort, Lord, your Holy people. Comfort those of us who sit in darkness, mourning beneath our sorrow's load. Speak to us of the peace that awaits us, of the balm of healing for our weary and wounded souls. We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of two or three who have gathered in Christ's name.

All: Amen.

THERE'S NOT A FRIEND LIKE THE LOWLY JESUS

*There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus
No, not one! No, not one!
None else could heal all our souls' diseases
No, not one! No, not one!*

*Jesus knows all about our struggles
He will guide 'til the day is done
There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus
No, not one! No, not one!*

SCRIPTURE READING

¹ In the days *when the judges ruled*, there was a *famine in the land*. So a man from *Bethlehem* in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, *went to live for a while* in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from *Bethlehem*, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

³ Now *Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died*, and *she was left with her two sons*. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both *Mahlon and Kilion also died*, and *Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband*.

⁶ When Naomi heard in Moab that *the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them*, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

⁷ With her two daughters-in-law *she left the place where she had been living* and *set out on the road* that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she *kissed them goodbye* and *they wept aloud* ¹⁰ and said to her, "*We will go back with you to your people.*"
-Ruth 1:1-10

BRIEF REFLECTION: BITTER GRIEF IN A BROKEN WORLD

OH LORD, HEAR MY PRAYER

*Oh Lord hear my prayer,
Oh Lord hear my prayer,
When I call, answer me.*

*Oh Lord hear my prayer,
Oh Lord hear my prayer,
Come and listen to me.*

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE (CANDLE LIGHTING)

You are invited to remain seated, to stand (even to pace), to kneel, to weep—whatever posture and practice might best facilitate your involvement and God's healing.

Leader: God who is with us, in this season of looking forward, of anticipating the celebration of your Son's birth and return in glory, we often find ourselves uncomfortable, uneasy, anxious, and grief-stricken. The lights and jubilation, the music and bright joy around us, often make us more unquiet, more out of step, feeling even more disconnected and different.

All: Be Near to Us, O God.

Leader: Some of the pain comes from unmet expectation, personal failure, relationships fractured, loved ones gone, hopes dashed, dreams shattered. Some of the pain is more generalized—loneliness, the uncertainty and fear of living in such a broken world, our energy reserves depleted from an enduring pandemic.

All: Be Near to Us, O God.

Leader: Trusting in your grace and provision, we name these situations and acknowledge the pain and dislocation they cause us. We claim your promise to companion us in bearing them. We claim your steadfast love for us, knowing you will help us find peace for our troubled spirits. We claim your wise and merciful power, that you will meet each need as is best for us.

All: Be Near to Us, O God.

Leader: God of Light and Life, we light this candle for all those who are struggling with issues involving physical or mental health. We especially remember those struggling with cancer, chronic illness, depression, or thoughts of suicide. May its light remind us all of the healing available to us in Christ Jesus. Hear our prayers that the anguish be met by your presence.

- *Moment of Reflection* -

Leader: We light this candle for all those who are struggling with financial concerns, job loss, or seemingly insurmountable debt. May its light remind us all that you are the Great Provider, you will give us our daily bread. Empower us to take the steps we need to address these concerns. Draw us to the right people and programs to help us.

AS THE DEER PANTETH FOR THE WATER

*As the deer panteth for the water
So my soul longeth after Thee
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee.*

Leader: We light this candle for all those who grieve. You know our deepest need, you understand our pain: lost dreams, lost opportunities, the separation of death. May its light remind us that we are not orphaned, we are not alone. Grant us grace that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, and in death... Resurrection.

STEAL AWAY TO JESUS

*Steal away, steal away
Steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home
I ain't got long to stay here

My Lord, He calls me
He calls me by the thunder
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul
I ain't got long to stay here*

Leader: We light this candle for all those shackled with the chains of addiction. Help us to name that which enslaves us as we face it: food, alcohol, drugs, pornography, shopping, escapism, self-medication, and self-abuse in all its forms. May this candle bring your light to those secret, and not so secret, activities of imprisonment. Hear our prayers for deliverance and freedom; help us and those we love break the hold of these evils. Help us and those we love to find the help we need. Give us courage to address the bondage, so that through you and the means you provide, we might find healing.

- *Moment of Reflection* -

Leader: We light this candle for all those who are victims of violence and abuse in any of its forms. May its light lead us to peace, safety, and truth. Pour forth encouragement and courage to claim your help in healing physically and spiritually, to trust in your justice, to find assistance, to resist blaming ourselves, and to be confident in the future you have planned for us, a future full of deep healing and renewal.

- *Moment of Reflection* -

Leader: We light this candle for all those who are experiencing the pain of broken relationships with family, children, spouses, and friends. May its light remind us of the pure communion you desire for all your creation. Our desire for this same communion makes estrangement so painful. Lead us to relinquish the hold broken relationships have on us, to forgive ourselves for our contribution to the breach, to forgive those who have hurt us, to take the steps to mend the relationships, if possible. Lord, some of us acknowledge we suffer from a broken relationship with someone who is now dead. Help us to prayerfully examine, receive, and extend forgiveness in that situation so that we may live free again.

- *Moment of Reflection* -

Leader: We light this candle for all those brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering the consequences of war, famine, and unbridled disease. May its light remind us of your holy calling to everyone who believes you are the light of the world. Change the hearts of all who resort to violence, who seek revenge. Protect those who find themselves far from home serving their nations or the needy. We know you are in the midst of those in anguish and pray that your healing presence will be seen, felt, and embraced. Reveal to us how to join in your saving work—to offer tangible provisions to alleviate suffering, to support those on the front lines of natural and manmade disasters, to pray unceasingly for peace in our families, our neighborhoods, and our world.

HOLD ON JUST A LITTLE WHILE LONGER

*Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer
Hold on just a little while longer
Everything will be alright
Everything will be alright*

*Pray on just a little while longer
Pray on just a little while longer
Pray on just a little while longer
Everything will be alright
Everything will be alright*

*Fight on just a little while longer
Fight on just a little while longer
Fight on just a little while longer
Everything will be alright
Everything will be alright*

Leader: We light this candle for all those who are estranged from you, who are besieged with doubts, who are overwhelmed by the trappings of the world and do not claim your presence in their lives. We pray for them, and therefore ourselves, for we confess that each of us knows this condition. Lord, may the light of your love lead us all home to you.

- *Moment of Reflection* -

Leader: These candles flit and flicker. They are but a tiny glimmer of light and hope. Yet, would we be captured by them, as a picture, O God, of your presence, even when you seem absent, as a picture of your healing, even when we face illness, as a picture of your wholeness, even when we face brokenness, as a picture of your confidence, even when we face uncertainty, as a picture of your companionship, even when we face loneliness, as a picture of your hope, even when we face grief, and as a picture of your life, even when we grieve death. We ask all these things in the strong name of Jesus.

Amen.

I LOVE THE LORD, HE HEARD MY CRY

*I love the Lord, he heard my cry
And pitied every groan, long as I, I live
And troubles rise, I hasten to his throne*

PRAYER

Gracious God, as a father has compassion on his children, as a mother carries and feeds her children, so do you have mercy on us, and carry us in our afflictions. We thank you for strengthening and renewing us in your love. We pray for grace to help you push back the darkness in our world, to help unfold your light, and to live with courage, kindness, and hope. Amen.

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

*It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

CONTACT US

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Looking to contact a specific staff member?

 wcpc.church/staff

SERVICES

Sundays, 9AM

Sundays, 11AM

Wednesdays, 12:15PM

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UPCOMING EVENTS

See all upcoming events at wcpc.church/events

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES | December 24, 4PM & 8PM

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE | December 25, 11AM

NEW YEARS DAY SERVICE | January 1, 11AM

EXPLORE WCPC | Beginning January 22, 10:10AM

MEN'S BREAKFAST | January 28, 8:30AM

NIGHT TO SHINE PROM EXPERIENCE | February 10, 5PM

BENEDICTION

The benediction is the "good word" of blessing. As Christians, we are convinced that God's love has the "last word," and that God's love ushers us with hope into a future of joy. These Scriptures are offered as a blessing over you in the midst of the grief and pain you bear. They are not a "quick fix strategy" or a "put a bow on it" resolution, but rather, they serve as an "as you go" promise. After hearing these words feel free to exit quietly or to linger in the sanctuary over the next hour.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." -1 Corinthians 15:51-54.

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." -Revelation 21:1-5

OBSERVING SILENCE

There will be short periods of silence during the service for personal reflection. Here are some suggestions for how to use this quiet time.

- Focus your awareness on your breathing.
- As you inhale, say to yourself, "I am breathing in... Thank you for life."
- As you exhale, "I am breathing out... Receive my being."
- Rest in God's presence.
- Do a body scan. Find the tension in your body. Attempt to relax your muscles. Say to yourself, "God, I rest in your presence."
- Focus on a sacred word.
- Allow a word to rise in your consciousness, and receive it as a gift. When distracting thoughts arise, come back to your sacred word as center.

WRITING LETTERS

You are invited to use the card to write a letter (or short note). And you don't have to participate! This letter might be addressed to God, to yourself, to a lost loved one, to one who is estranged, to one who has wronged you or one whom you have wronged, etc. You may choose to send the letter or to hold onto it. Also, if you prefer to "bury the letter" we have dissolvable paper as well. This exercise is designed to help you name something (loss, grief, pain, sadness, addiction, anxiety, anger, fear, frustration, loneliness). The time allotted in the service might be insufficient. Feel free to stay afterwards to finish your letter or to do so in your own time frame. Consider taking an action as follow-up to this exercise (pursue counseling, have a conversation, adopt a new ritual, commit to prayer, etc.).

HEALING PRESENCE

We recognize over the holidays that for some, healing presence and physical touch are difficult to come by. A team is standing by in the back of the sanctuary. This team consists of staff members, elders, and deacons who are trained to offer physical touch in an appropriate manner. If you need a prayer, a blessing ("May God's tender mercy be with you"), a hug, or a shoulder to cry on, they are here for you. As you make your way to the back of the room, one of our team will ask you how you can be best ministered to (with a prayer, a blessing, a hug, or all of the above).