



“The Longest Night Service” - December 15th, 2022 at 7:00pm

Gathering Music
Lindsey-Botten

Instrumental and Vocals

~ John

Welcome

One: As we gather our hearts in this space, to worship on this Longest Night, I invite you to close your eyes and take a deep breath. Inhale the good. Exhale what is hurting. We take this moment to meet with Jesus who has been with us in our highs and our lows of life. (*Elder lights a candle*) We light this candle to remind us that Christ is the light that shines in the darkness.

One: And we light the Peace candle (*Elder lights Peace Candle*) as a reminder that Jesus taught us to live in peace with all Creation. As the congregation of Knox United, we acknowledge that we live, work, worship and play within the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. As those who follow Jesus' path of peace,

All: we commit ourselves to upholding the Treaties of Peace and Friendship so that we will live in a good way with all peoples, the land, the waters, and all of Creation, for we are all treaty people.

One: We light the Affirmation Candle (*Elder lights Affirmation candle*) as a celebration of all the wonderful diversity in which God creates us and calls us good! In this community of faith, we celebrate that all are welcome in this place.

All: All are welcome by God's grace.

Call To Worship

One: This is the season when we gather to celebrate in joy.

All: *Yet, we come with grief in our hearts. We long to hold on to the good news that Jesus is coming once again.*

One: The cry of a baby, born on a night long ago, rings through the centuries.

All: *That cry is there to remind us of God's presence at our own birth.*

One: The tears of grief echo in our hearts.

All: *The tears remind us of God in all things.*

One: So let us worship with grief and joy intertwined as we share our faith.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray ... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be. What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Astounding God, as the days of December continue to shorten, we yearn for the light of Christ. It amazes us how a single beam of light can illumine the corners of grief and the spaces of despair. May our hearts be open to the glory that is to be revealed as the Christ light permeates the dimmed parts of our souls, heavy with loneliness and sadness, but filled with comfort and hope as we know we are not alone, you are always with us. Reveal to us your Advent love, we ask you. Amen.

Opening Hymn "In The Bleak Midwinter"

VU 55

Prayer of Illumination

One: God, we do not have night vision. The sun has set on the world as we know it and we do not have night vision. So today we come to your word hoping that this ancient truth found in scripture will feel like a hand in the dark. Guide our feet. Move us through this wilderness season. Tilt our heads upward to see the stars, and let your word be a blanket in the cold, a light on the horizon, and a friend to walk along side. We do not have night vision, but we know we have you. Move

through us. Move among us and move through us. Gratefully we pray, amen.

Scripture Reading

Suggestions are

Psalm 121

- offered by ???

Words of God that are still speaking.

Thanks be to God!

Spiritual Reflection Poem

The following amended poem is written by Rev. Sarah Are Speed, as we have settled into our service here tonight, let us listen to this honest reflection and allow the honesty to make the space as one set apart.

We are raw nerves, exposed and tender.
We are weary bones, hunched and fragile.
We are silent prayers, lips saying your name.
We are wedding rings we can't take off, even though time has passed.
We are the same cute, but it feels different now.
We are a brave face when we have to be strong.
We are tears in the shower when grief roars its head.
We are setting the table, but there are empty seats.
We are stuck in the swell, caught in the storm.
We are moving forward, caught in our guilt.
We are okay some days, but some days we are not.
We are familiar with the night, we know it by name.
We are night walkers, dream makers, starchasers.
We are close to home, but home has changed.
We are close to the surface, but the waters are rising.
We are all of this, plus everything else, and we are here.
We are here. Grief is here. God is here.
The night is here.
And all of this is true, and we are not alone.
Take my hand.
Take these words.
Let them be your life raft.
Let this be the longest night, and let it be whatever you need it to be.
We are here. Grief is here. God is here.
Take what you need. Amen.

Musical Solo “Peace and Light, and Spirits Bright” ~ *John Lindsey-Botten*

Candle Litany of Remembrance

(The first candle is lit)

One: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. Knowing we are gifted with our beautiful memories and the love shared, we embrace them in this season of expectation, when all creation waits for the Light. And so we sing ...

Litany Music *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*

(The second candle is lit)

One: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace. And so we sing ...

Litany Music *O come thou Wisdom from on high,
who orderest all things mightily
To us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

(The third candle is lit)

One: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this season. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. In our grieving, you are always present, to send a sign, a kind deed, a loving embrace, just when we needed it the most. You always seem to know when we

feel most alone, your spirit brings us light and love to surround us during those dark times. And so we sing ...

Litany Music *O come thou day-spring, come and cheer
our spirits by thy advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

(The fourth candle is lit)

One: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us at the birth of the Christ-child, which also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises to be with us, come what may. And so we sing ...

Litany Music: *O come desire of nations, come,
bind in one the hearts of all mankind
Bid then our sad, divisions cease,
and be thyself our King of Peace
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel*

Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray ...

God who always welcomes us home – tonight is a long night. We gather together heavy with our prayer concerns. They tumble out of our mouths, they saturate every word we sing, they lay over us like a quilt, weigh on our spirits.

We are a million combinations of weary and sad; lonely and grieving; angry and hurt. It is obvious that we need you.

God, we need you in the messy middles; in the unclear paths forward; the transition seasons; and the splinterings of what once was.

God, we need you in the grieving places: in the dining rooms with empty chairs; in the empty wombs; and in the dark of the tomb.

God, we need you in our failed dreams; in shame that rises quickly; in the unknown next steps; and the discernment that is always easier said than done.

Flood are grieving hearts. Pour out your spirit on this world. Where there is suffering, loneliness, poverty, abuse, addiction, depression – be there.

We are there.

Wrap your arms around those hurting places, and carry us to your promise day.

We lift up our prayers to you tonight and those silently on our hearts to your O God.

I now invite you all to think of a person, incident, experience, or need that you wish to lift up to God.

As we have prayed together as a community individually and communally, let us take a few moments to ritualize the weight and significance of these prayers. I now invite you, as you are able, to come forward to light a candle or two in honor of that prayer. Let us watch as the darkness gives way to the light.

(When people return to their seat)

In the presence of God, alongside Jesus Christ, with help from the Spirit may we continue to journey in this Advent season knowing we are not alone. We lift all our prayers to you on this longest night, Jesus Christ has taught us to pray, because you are Our Mother and

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us, And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,

Forever and ever. Amen.

Communal Blessing

My blessing to you this evening ... Jesus Christ, the light and love that shines in our hearts, who lived among us, suffered, and died for the sake of all suffering and hurting humans, yesterday, today, and tomorrow; the peace of God, which passes all understanding; and the presence of God's Holy Spirit supporting and encouraging you, be with you through this season of the longest night.

Closing Hymn "All Poor Ones and Humble" VU 68

Closing Blessing

As we have come to the end of our service, John will be playing some quiet instrumental music for a few minutes after my closing blessing to you all, but you are more than welcome to stay behind for some quiet reflection here in the sanctuary. Also, a member of the pastoral care team, or myself, will be available if anyone would like to speak with them.

As we have gathered this evening, we embraced and claimed the darkness that is both present in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace and joy this Christmas season.

Postlude

Instrumental Music

~ *John Lindsey-Botten*

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