The Longest Night: A Service of Comfort and Hope
December 20, 2020

Remembering Is What We Do Together
Jan Richardson
GATHERING MUSIC

Coventry Carol  
Ancient English Melody

Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming  
arr. Suzanne McDonald and Linda Wood

Still, Still, Still  
arr. Daniel Burton

WORDS OF WELCOME AND INTENT

CALL TO WORSHIP

One:  Creator God, come and dwell in this space —
All:  For our grief is like an ocean, its current pulling us down to the depths, and we need you to shelter us from the crashing waves.
One:  Creator God, come and hold us in your arms —
All:  For it’s hard to remember the last time we were held in a loving embrace, or the last person we touched, and we need you to carry us.
One:  Creator God, in times of joy and in times of sorrow, we turn to you.
All:  Thank you for staying with us through the longest nights.
We worship and adore you.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

One:  We light this first candle in memory of those persons we have lost through death.
All:  We remember them by name in our hearts. We give thanks for them and for their lives. We treasure their memories in this difficult season.
One:  We light this second candle to ask for deliverance from the pain of loss — the loss of relationships, the loss of health, the loss of jobs, the loss of financial security, the loss of life.
All:  We ask that God bring us comfort. We know the pain of loss draws near at this time of year, and we ask for peace and renewal.
One:  We light this third candle for each of us. We offer up to God our pasts, the times of regret and sorrow, the times of mourning, and the times of loneliness and pain.
All:  We ask that God take away the fear of darkness and doubt.
One:  We light this fourth candle as a symbol of hope and promise.
All:  We invite and celebrate the coming of the One who promises us no more suffering...the One who promises us new life.
Come, Lord Jesus.
As pants the deer for living streams,

Tears are my bread both night and day; fools crush me, soul and bone.

Deep calls to deep, the billows roar; they cover me with pain.

O send your light to guide me home; my Savior, guide me still.

I thirst for you, O living God; I long to see your face!

They laugh and ask, “Where is your God?” I hope in you alone.

I cry for healing and for home; God, show your love again!

With shouting pilgrims I will come to climb your holy hill.

O how I miss the happy days when with the throng I’d praise!

Why cast me off? Where have you gone? Why is your grace with-drawn?

With-out your peo-ple, who am I? With-out you I will die.

Then with the harp I’ll sing your praise; my happy voice I’ll raise.

Take courage now, my trembling heart, for God will take your part!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: God of connection and love, we confess —

All: There are people singing tonight,

but our hearts are too heavy for singing.

One: God of confidence and trust, we confess —

All: We know that we need you, but sometimes it’s hard to let you in.

Sometimes we allow grief and fear to build walls to protect our fragile hearts.

One: God of the here and now, we confess —

All: There is guilt that we carry, memories of things we should have done and words we should have said, but forgiving ourselves seems impossible and unnecessary.

One: God of our prayers and dreams, we confess —

All: This path of grief is miserably hard, bringing out the worst in us.

By your grace, forgive us when we get it wrong, forgive us when we think we’re right, and forgive us when we can’t even bother to try...

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

PASSING OF THE PEACE
RESPONSE

And you, beneath life’s crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing:
O, rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing.

This is Stanza 4 of Hymn 123, It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.

A POEM

This Room and Everything in It
by Li-Young Lee

Lie still now
while I prepare for my future,
certain hard days ahead,
when I'll need what I know so clearly this moment.

I am making use
of the one thing I learned
of all the things my father tried to teach me:
the art of memory.

I am letting this room
and everything in it
stand for my ideas about love
and its difficulties.

I’ll let your love-cries,
those spacious notes
of a moment ago,
stand for distance.

Your scent,
that scent
of spice and a wound,
I’ll let stand for mystery.

Your sunken belly
is the daily cup
of milk I drank
as a boy before morning prayer.
The sun on the face
of the wall
is God, the face
I can’t see, my soul,

and so on, each thing
standing for a separate idea,
and those ideas forming the constellation
of my greater idea.
And one day, when I need
to tell myself something intelligent
about love,
I'll close my eyes
and recall this room and everything in it:
My body is estrangement.
This desire, perfection.
Your closed eyes my extinction.
Now I've forgotten my
idea. The book
on the windowsill, riffled by wind . . .
the even-numbered pages are
the past, the odd-numbered pages, the future.
The sun is
God, your body is milk . . .
useless, useless . . .
your cries are song, my body's not me . . .
no good . . . my idea
has evaporated . . . your hair is time, your thighs are song . . .
it had something to do
with death . . . it had something
to do with love.

VOICES FROM SCRIPTURE
Isaiah 40:1, 25–31
Psalm 102
Jeremiah 31:31–34

MEDITATION  Take Me by the Hand

REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES
Music for Reflection and Remembrance
Spiegel im Spiegel  Arvo Pärt

We invite you during this time to journal, to light a candle, to pray, to cry, to
dance, to scream, to do whatever you need to do to honor your grief and any
other emotions you may be carrying. Open yourself to the emotions, and
then turn them over to God.
Precious Lord, Take My Hand

1 Precious Lord, take my hand; lead me on, help me stand; I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

2 When my way grows dear, precious Lord, linger near; when my life is almost gone,

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I

light; take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

fall; take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

GIVING OUR GIFTS

Offering Music  Siciliano from Sonata No. 2 in E-flat Major  J. S. Bach

PASTORAL PRAYER, UNISON PRAYER, AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

After the minister prays, please join in this unison prayer:

God of creation, you gave us love. Thus tonight, as our hearts hurt due to love lost, we ask that you give us comfort. Flood our minds with memories of love and with gratitude for all of those moments. As we wade through this Christmas season, help us to catch glimpses of you in the midst of our heartache. God of light and hope, give us peace instead of resentment. Give us you instead of the mere thought of you. And if you can, give it to us sooner rather than later. Gratefully we pray, using the words you gave to us, saying: Our Father…Amen.
1 “I will come to you in the silence;
2 “I am hope for all who are hope-less;
3 “I am strength for all the despair-ing,
4 am the Word that leads all to freedom;

I will lift you from all your fear.
I am eyes for all who long to see.
In the healing for the ones who dwell in shame.
am the peace the world can not give.

You will hear my voice; I claim you as my choice. Be
shadows of the night, I will be your light.
All the blind will see; the lame will all run free, and
I will call your name, embracing all your pain. Stand

still and know I am here. (to stanza 2)
Come and rest in me. (to Refrain)
all will know my name. (to Refrain)
up, now walk and live! (to Refrain)

Refrain

Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by
name. Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I

love you and you are mine.”

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SENDING

One: Family of God, tonight we gathered together in God’s presence to make space for our grief. We have remembered our loss. We have acknowledged it, named it, and placed it before God. And now we carry in our hearts memories of this night.

All: For we trust that God is present even in the darkest valleys and through the longest nights. We trust that neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And we trust that, one day, we will all be reunited in the promised land where God will wipe away every tear, and death will be no more.

One: Go now in peace, trusting that you are loved, you are known, and you are never alone. Amen.

SENDING MUSIC

*Meditation on the First Prelude of J. S. Bach*

Charles Gounod

*Ave Maria*

Leaders of Worship:

Welcome and Meditation – Andrew Frazier; Candlelighters – Sallie Parker and Nancy Parker; Liturgists – Sharon Sheldon, Deborah Campbell, Pat Gilbreath, and Melissa Anne Rogers; Scripture Readers – Nancy Fox, Jim Clark, and Marita Servais; Musicians – Tyrese Byrd, voice; Deborah Gabrion, harp; Stefan Koch, cello; and Paul Haebig, piano; Videographer – Jim Campbell

All are invited to celebrate Christ’s birth together in spirit on Christmas Eve. More information about these services is available on our website.

- Nativity Worship Service premieres virtually at 1:00 p.m.
- A Service of Lessons and Carols premieres virtually at 5:00 p.m.
- A Christmas Eve Fireside Service premieres virtually at 11:00 p.m.

At long last, we welcome you home on Christmas Eve! You are invited to stroll through the Sanctuary this Thursday, December 24, between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m. Luminaria welcome you outside while inside you will be greeted by the beautiful music of the Sanctus Ringers and piano. Enjoy a live nativity and poinsettias will fill the Chancel. You are invited to make a Christmas Eve donation to CEPAD, a Christian organization working with poor communities in Nicaragua to support recovery in Nicaragua after Hurricane Eta. As you exit, you will light a candle to take the light of Christ out into the world and receive a Christmas Eve blessing from a pastor. All participants must wear masks and remain socially distanced. **Reservations are required for safety regulations.** Sign up online or by contacting the Church Office.