

Blue Worship 2019

Wednesday, November 20th, 2019

Words of Welcome

Welcome. Our worship tonight is meant to be a time to acknowledge together the 'blue' feelings we may have during the holiday season. Memories of past experiences, the pain of present experiences, or the grief of loss can become overwhelming. In this service, we invite you to come as you are, feel what you feel, and offer it to God for healing and transformation. We invite you to pray, listen, sing, meditate, and seek God's peace in a meaningful way. We trust that you will find hope and comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Always remember that God knows your pain and loves you unconditionally.

Prayer of Lament - adapted verses from Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go on mourning, oppressed by my enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise God, my Savior and my Lord.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 130

"A Psalm of Lament: Psalm 130.
Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;
 Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
 to my cry for mercy.
If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
 Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
 so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
 and in his word I hope;
My soul waits for the Lord
 more than those who watch for the morning,
 more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
 For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
 and with him is great power to redeem."

Poetry: "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.

Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Sung Response: “Abide With Me”, UMH #700 (Verse 1)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 11:28-29

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Poetry: “The Peace of Wild Things” by Wendell Berry

When despair grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting for their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Sung Response: “Abide With Me”, UMH #700 (Verse 2)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—

to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

Poetry: “Blessing When the World is Ending” by Jan Richardson

Look, the world
is always ending
somewhere.
Somewhere
the sun has come
crashing down.
Somewhere
it has gone
completely dark.
Somewhere
it has ended
with the gun
the knife
the fist.
Somewhere
it has ended
with the slammed door
the shattered hope.
Somewhere
it has ended
with the utter quiet
that follows the news
from the phone
the television
the hospital room.
Somewhere
it has ended
with a tenderness
that will break
your heart.
But, listen,
this blessing means
to be anything
but morose.
It has not come
to cause despair.
It is simply here
because there is nothing
a blessing

is better suited for
than an ending,
nothing that cries out more
for a blessing
than when a world
is falling apart.
This blessing
will not fix you
will not mend you
will not give you
false comfort;
it will not talk to you
about one door opening
when another one closes.
It will simply
sit itself beside you
among the shards
and gently turn your face
toward the direction
from which the light
will come,
gathering itself
about you
as the world begins
again.

Sung Response: “Abide With Me”, UMH #700 (Verse 3)

Scripture Reading: John 14:1-4, 18-19, 27

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.... “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live....Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Poetry: “December,” a poem by Gary Johnson.

A little girl is singing for the faithful to come ye
Joyful and triumphant, a song she loves,
And also the partridge in a pear tree
And the golden rings and the turtle doves.
In the dark streets, red lights and green and blue
Where the faithful live, some joyful, some troubled,
Enduring the cold and also the flu,
Taking the garbage out and keeping the sidewalk shoveled.
Not much triumph going on here—and yet
There is much we do not understand.
And my hopes and fears are met

In this small singer holding onto my hand.
Onward we go, faithfully, into the dark
And are there angels hovering overhead? Hark.

Sung Response: "Abide With Me", UMH #700 (Verse 4)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-31

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Poetry: "I will Light Candles this Christmas" by Howard Thurman

I will light Candles this Christmas;
Candles of joy despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

Sung Response: "Abide With Me", UMH #700 (Verse 5)

Time of Sharing - Rev. Charles Lancaster

Time of Response

***Lighting Candles**

You are invited to come forward to light one of the votive candles which represents your burdens, griefs, sorrows; all those things which make this season a "blue" time for you. You may speak the name, event, or pain aloud if you wish to do so as you light the candle. You may return to your seat or move to another station when you are ready.

***Prayer at the Rail**

You are invited to kneel at the altar rail and pray for as long as you'd like. You can pray on your own, or find someone to pray with and share a quiet time of prayer together. You may return to your seat or move to another station when you are ready.

***Prayer through Art**

You are invited to go to the table with the posterboard and add your own imprint there. Choose scraps of tissue that best represent how you are feeling in this moment, then use the brush and glue to add them to the heart on the poster. Add them in whatever location, texture, or pattern best suits you. You may return to your seat or move to another station when you are ready.

***Anointing**

You may choose to be anointed with oil and prayed over. Oil is a symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit and is often used in prayers of healing and wholeness. Once you have been anointed, you may return to your seat or move to another station when you are ready.

Prayers of Intercession and The Lord's Prayer¹

Leader: All around us are the sights and sounds of the holidays, Gentle God: the laughter of parties, the music and decorations in every store. But deep within us we carry our pain, our grief walks with us every step we take, loneliness is a shawl we drape over our shoulders on empty nights.

All: So, in this time when every night stretches into eternity, we come to you, bringing our gifts: not gold, frankincense and myrrh, but the grief that is the empty space in the

¹ Based on a litany from *Candles and Conifers*, by Ruth Burgess (Wild Goose Publications: 2005)

closet filled with memories, the loss that is a sore which never heals, the bitterness that tastes like two-day old coffee.

Leader: We have come from different backgrounds, from different families, from other faith traditions. But we have all lived in the far country of despair, wandered the land of shame, built our lives in those neighborhoods peopled by empty dreams.

All: We have stood on the side of every room we have gone into, hoping against hope that someone would ask us to dance, but find the wall is our only friend.

Leader: In a season when so many people don't have enough hours in a day to get their lists checked off, their cards mailed, their presents wrapped, we have all the time in the world:

All: to remember the loss that has stolen the joy of the season; to grieve over a job, a dream, a loved one we have lost; to sit in the shadows of our homes, too weary to turn on the lights; to wander the streets lit by decorations on all the houses, but not by the Light of the world.

Leader: Our fear of the future, our remembrance of the past; our pain which is difficult to bear and harder to release; our emptiness which cannot be filled with platitudes; our hands which cannot hold the ones we wish to embrace: all make this a season of long nights.

All: So, be with us in our loneliness, in our longing, in our loss, in our lives.

Leader: O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing: to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons. In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold,

All: teach us the lessons of beginnings; that such waitings and endings may be the starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born--something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—in the fullness of your time. O God, grant us the sense of your timing. In Your Name, and with the words you taught us, we pray...Our Father, who art in Heaven...

Final Scripture Reading: Words of Hope from 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us. We have plenty of hard times that come as we follow the Messiah, but also the assurance of his healing comfort."

***Closing Hymn: Hymn of Promise, UMH #707**

Benediction and Sending

Almighty God, you love us as your own precious children. So we pray that when we suffer, you would make us whole. When we are afraid, give us courage; when we are despairing, grant us strength; when we are blue, wrap us in your warm love; when they are lost, show us the light of your way; when we are alone, put our hands in those of our neighbors; and keep us all as your beloved children, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.