

Blue Christmas
Copper Creek Church
2022, Dec 8

The Gathering of Our Community

Thank you for joining us this evening. Our prayer is that this time will give you the space to meet God exactly where you're at tonight. Christmas is beautiful in so many ways. But sometimes it can be really hard too. Grief seems to sting a little more in December. So tonight, I encourage you to simply be. Don't try and be any particular way. Just be. We're going to do things a little differently tonight. Responsive readings and lyrics can be found either in your bulletin or on the screen. Please join me in a responsive call to worship.

Leader: In the midst of festivities, shouts, and bright lights, we feel the darkness of our souls.

All: Come, God of power and Light, help us.

L: In the midst of gatherings, we feel alone and alienated.

All: Come, God of peace and Hope, hear our cries.

L: In the midst of celebration, our hearts cry out.

All: Lord, hear us and come to us. Bring us peace. AMEN.

Prayer:

God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings, and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your son Jesus. AMEN.

Chandler Moore— It's Okay (song)

Lighting of the Wreath

This evening, we will embrace the tradition of the Advent Wreath. We will light a candle as we offer our prayers. Following each candle, there will be a space for you to share your remembrance either in silence or out loud.

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Following each candle, we will sing a verse from the hymn “O come, O come, Emmanuel.” This is a song of people in darkness longing for God’s light. It is not calling us to rejoice in the worldly form of the word but calling our spirits and souls to reflect the true hope and joy that only God can give.

CANDLE 1: This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourn in lonely exile here,
Until the son of God appears.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

CANDLE 2: This candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

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CANDLE 3: This candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other, or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together.

*O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

CANDLE 4: This candle represents our love. The love we have given and the love we have received. The love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt, and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow.

*O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,
an ensign of thy people be;
before thee rulers silent fall;
all peoples on thy mercy call.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The Many– Longest Nights

Homily

Isaiah 40: 27-29

27
Jacob, why do you say,

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and Israel, why do you declare,
“My way is hidden from the Lord,
my God ignores my predicament”?

28

Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

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

The Lord doesn't grow tired or weary.

God's understanding is beyond human reach,

29

giving power to the tired
and reviving the exhausted.

How reassuring. God's understanding is beyond human reach- giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted. How comforting is that? That we don't have to understand everything, and we don't have to move heaven and earth to fix things for everyone else. It is a beautiful thing to be told.

I don't know if I will remember that point tomorrow, though. That's the sticky part. I don't know if I will have a rough day again, and my first thought will be, “God gives power to the tired and revives the exhausted.” I think it may be my first thought that “I can fix this.” Even if it's not mine to fix. Not mine to hold. If it prevents someone else from fixing it, I can do it.

This week, after only two sessions with my new therapist, she looked at me and said, “So, I'm hearing that you have some ‘fixer’ tendencies.” And I laughed and said, “yes, you could say that.” Because I grew up knowing that if I could hold everything else for everyone else, no one else would need to be sad or to hold heavy things.

But here's the thing- heavy stuff is just a part of life. And that sucks. I really wish I was able to tell you something else. I wish I could take away every bit of pain that nagged you to attend this service tonight. I can't do that; it's actually really annoying that I can't do that. But here's the thing, “Don't you know? Haven't you heard?

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

The Lord doesn't grow tired or weary.

God's understanding is beyond human reach,

giving power to the tired
and reviving the exhausted.

I promise I am not standing here telling you to pray, and your anxiety and depression will go away. I'm not saying that your chronic pain will be healed the moment you step into a church for the 100th time, exactly. I am not saying that you'll be happy when you

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leave here and everything will be fine. If any of that were the case, I would have spent a LOT less on medications and therapy bills.

What I *am* saying is that God is in your corner. Even when nothing feels like it is helping and everything feels too big to hold and too dark to carry, God is there to help carry it. You may not feel it. Those are the hardest times; I think, when it feels like you're truly alone in all of it. But God is with you in those darkest times. God's understanding is beyond human reach. God doesn't get tired. God doesn't think your feelings are overwhelming or "too much." Whenever you start feeling like your feelings are too much, or you're getting overwhelmed, or you're feeling like maybe there is a chance this won't work out how you need it to, I truly encourage you to read this scripture. Maybe put it on a sticky note, in your car, or on your mirror... God can carry every bit of all of our Heavy Stuff. And God would never even get tired.

Set down the heavy stuff you're carrying for other people. You have enough heavy stuff on your own. Set all of it in front of God, every bit of it. Yes, even that very last thing that you can't trust anyone else with. That too. Set it down. God will carry it with you. Because God won't get tired, God will give you strength.

I found this prayer of the people while looking for resources for tonight. I hope this prayer is able to cover the multitude of all you're carrying. Please pray with me-

Gracious God, in this season of Advent, we give thanks that you came to be among us: Emmanuel, God with us. You came into the darkness of that time: a time of change and stress, uncertainty and doubt. You did not enter this world surrounded by grand things. You were born in a stable to parents far from home. O God, we pray for your presence here and now in the difficulties of our time. We lay before you our offerings of honesty and need, of worry and hope. For all who are grieving, we pray: O Lord, you know what it means to lose someone you dearly love.

For all who are lonely, we pray: O Lord, you know how it feels to look around you and feel that there is no one left. For all who are anxious, we pray: O Lord, you know what it is like to be weary and heavy-laden. For all who are vulnerable, we pray: O Lord, you know what it means to be unhoused and unsafe. For all who are beset by challenges, physical or emotional, we pray: O Lord, you know how it feels to be in pain. For all who long for light and hope, we pray: O Lord, you know what it is like to wait in the darkness. ... Here, we offer our personal petitions in silence. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you came to be among us, full of grace and truth. In you, we find our welcome. You are our comfort and our company along the journey of our life. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Lighting of Individual Candles

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Leader: Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, and broken pieces. I want to invite each of you to offer your personal wounds to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain. God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are heavily laden, I will refresh you!"

I invite each of you to come forward and light a candle. As you light the candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine.

Lighting candles (Be Still- The Fray)

Leader: These lights, in their brightness, are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

CLOSING

Tonight, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the 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, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

Postlude Playlist

****parts of this service came from Nancy C. Townley, who writes for Ministry Matters****