

Blue Christmas

a service for the longest night

December 20, 2020
6pm



Welcome & Introduction to Blue Christmas – A Service for the Longest Night

Opening Acclamation

Leader: Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world

Response: **The light no darkness can overcome**

Leader: Stay with us now for it is evening

Response: **And the day is almost over**

Leader: Let your light scatter the darkness

Response: **And shine within your people here.**

Reading

Welcoming Blessing

Jan Richardson

Prayer

Holy and Gracious God, you have searched us and known us, and so you know how difficult it is for us at times to be whole-hearted in our celebration of the birth of your Son. There are parts of us that cannot hear the angels' song. We believe their tidings of great joy are for some people, but not for us. O God, continue to love us, we pray, through our grief and struggles. Help us finally hear your promise that you walk beside us, and you will help us carry our burdens. **Amen.**

Lighting of the Candles

Reading

Heavy

Mary Oliver

The First Advent Candle – for those we have lost

We light these first candles to remember those persons we have loved and who have been lost: to death, to addiction, to depression and despair, to illness and dementia, to the end of relationship... We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season as we await the birth of the Light of the World.

Reading

For Suffering

John O'Donohue

The Second Advent Candle – for other losses

We light these candles to remember other losses: loss of ease in our daily lives, loss of freedom, companionship, security, job, youth, health, community ... As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God of the living, asking that from your open hands we receive the gift of peace.

Reading

Invitation to Brave Space

Mickey ScottBey Jones

The Third Advent Candle – for ourselves and the world

We light these candles to remember ourselves and our world as 2020 draws to a close. We remember the suffering, the grief, the sadness, the hurt, the division, the conflict in our own hearts and in the world. We remember that darkness contains sacred mystery. In darkness new life germinates, gestates and takes its first form. We belong to a God who came out of the womb, and also out of the tomb.

Reading

And the people stayed home

Kitty O'Meara

The Fourth Advent Candle – for hope and light in the darkness

We light these candles trusting in the gift of hope God offers us in the birth of Jesus. We remember that God is fully present in our lives and that *neither death nor life, ...nor things present nor things to come, ...nor anything else in all creation*, is able to separate us from God's love. We light these candles as a sign of our hope and our faith that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

Reading

John 1:1-5

The Lord's Prayer

Responsive Prayer

Leader: *We trust that beyond the absence...*
Response: **There is a presence**
Leader: *That beyond the pain and loneliness...*
Response: **There can be healing**
Leader: *That beyond the brokenness...*
Response: **There can be wholeness**
Leader: *That beyond hurting...*
Response: **There can be forgiveness**
Leader: *That beyond silence...*
Response: **There can be the Word**
Leader: *That through the Word made Flesh...*
Response: **There can be Love.**

Reading

Blessing for the Longest Night

Jan Richardson

The Blessing

The Peace

All are welcome to remain for a time of silent reflection. Please depart in silence and extinguish your candles.

Participants

The Rev. Joyce Keeshin
The Rev. Melanie W. J. Slane
The Rev. Gary Lubin
Becca Morehous
Anny Stevens-Gleason

The Readings his evening's readings are as follows: *Welcoming Blessing* from *The Cure for Sorrow*, *A book of Blessings for Times of Grief* by Jan Richardson, *Heavy* from *Thirst* by Mary Oliver; *For Suffering* from *To Bless the Space Between Us* by John O'Donohue, *Invitation to Brave Space* by Micky ScottBey Jones; *And the people stayed home* by Kitty O'Meara, *The Gospel According to John*, Chapter 1, verses 1-5; *Blessing for the Longest Night* also from *The Cure for Sorrow*, by Jan Richardson.

When you are lost
in your own life.

When the landscape
you have known
falls away.

When your familiar path
becomes foreign
and you find yourself
a stranger
in the story you had held
most dear.

Then let yourself
be lost.
Let yourself leave
for a place
whose contours
you do not already know,
whose cadences
you have not learned
by heart.

Let yourself land
on a threshold
that mirrors the mystery
of your own
bewildered soul.

It will come
as a surprise,
what arrives
to welcome you
through the door,
making a place for you
at the table
and calling you
by your name.

Let what comes,
come.

Let the glass
be filled.

Let the light
be tended.

Let the hands
lay before you
what will meet you
in your hunger.

Let the laughter.

Let the sweetness
that enters
the sorrow.

Let the solace
that comes
as sustenance
and sudden, unbidden
grace.

For what comes,
offer gladness.

For what greets you
with kindly welcome,
offer thanks.

Offer blessing
for those
who gathered you in
and will not
be forgotten ~

those who,
when you were
a stranger,
made a place for you
at the table
and called you
by your name.

Heavy

Mary Oliver

That time
I thought I could not
go any closer to grief
without dying
I went closer,
and I did not die.
Surely God
had His hand in this,
as well as friends.
Still, I was bent,
and my laughter,
as the poet said,
was nowhere to be found.
Then said my friend Daniel
(brave even among lions),
“It’s not the weight you carry
but how you carry it ~
books, bricks, grief ~

it’s all in the way
you embrace it, balance it, carry it
when you cannot, and would not,
put it down.”
So I went practicing.
Have you noticed?
Have you heard
the laughter
that comes, now and again,
out of my startled mouth?
How I linger
to admire, admire, admire
the things of this world
that are kind, and maybe
also troubled ~
roses in the wind,
the sea geese on ~ the steep waves,
a love
to which there is no reply?

For Suffering

John O’Donohue

May you be blessed in the holy names of
those
Who, without you knowing it,
Help to carry and lighten your pain.
May you know serenity
When you are called
To enter the house of suffering.
May a window of light always surprise you.

May you be granted the wisdom
To avoid false resistance;
When suffering knocks on the door of your
life,

May you glimpse its eventual gifts.
May you be able to receive the fruits of
suffering.
May memory bless and protect you
With the hard-earned light of past travail;
To remind you that you have survived before
And though the darkness now is deep,
You will soon see the approaching light.
May the grace of time heal your wounds.
may you know that though the storm might
rage,
Not a hair of your head will be harmed.

Invitation to a Brave Space**Mickey ScottBey Jones**

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a “safe
space”
We exist in the real world
We all carry scars and we have all caused
wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the
outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard
elsewhere,

We call each other to more truth and love
We have the right to start somewhere and
continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what
we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But, it will be our brave space together,
And we will work on it side by side.

And the people stayed home**Kitty O’Meara**

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.

And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Blessing for the Longest Night

Jan Richardson

All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.
It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.
So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.
You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;

a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.
This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.
So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.
This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.