

Blue Christmas – December 9th, 2020
Those Who Dream resource, Sanctified Art

Prelude:

There's an Advent tradition within Western Christianity of inviting people to come together for the Longest Night, a night around the time of the winter solstice, when there are more hours of darkness than light. It's a time to come together for prayers and laments, to mourn the losses and griefs of the year, to let the tears flow for the hurting places in our own lives, as well as for our country and our world. Known also as "Blue Christmas,"¹ a Longest Night Gathering is a safe and sacred space to share anguish, to plead with God to remember us, to pray for justice and restoration, even to hope against hope, through our doubts and tears and fears, that "God will set things right all over the earth."

Material needed for this time of worship: four pieces of note paper and a pen.

Welcome and Call to Worship:

Reader 1:

Welcome to a worship resource – prepared for you by McClure United Church. Now is a time for us to be together in the dark. But, let's admit it, so often darkness scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. We've been taught to fear it, to avoid it, to keep the lights on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend everything's all right, and to not go into "that dark place."

Yet we are here to acknowledge the dark because God created light and dark, day and night... and said both were good. To fear darkness is to miss what we can see there that we can't see clearly anywhere else. So, here we are. We are in the dark.

We are here to acknowledge we are in the dark about so many things: We have so many unanswered questions. We have so much fear and sorrow we can't make sense of—tucked away in secret places. And for some of us, we have fresh grief that's raw and feels unending. Here we are in the dark.

We can hear in this worship an invitation to not run so quickly to the bright shiny objects, to easy answers, and loud, well-lit rooms. This sacred darkening makes room for all of who we are—for our laments and longings, our confessions and our cries. This darkness can help us see what we cannot see in the light. This dark and holy night can perhaps even be a night where dreams are dreamed, hope can be born. Here we are.

Reader 2:

Now, we will be participating in the long-standing biblical tradition of lament, the practice of mourning for all that's wrong and crying out—to God and with God—to make things right. Yes, with God. One of the things we learn from scripture is that God also laments. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that God has a scroll filled with God's own handwritten words of grief and sorrow. So, we do not lament alone.

One of the ways people expressed their laments in the Bible was by rending...by tearing their clothes. David does it when he hears of his daughter Tamar's rape, and when Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle. Job did it when he lost pretty much everything he owned and everyone he loved. Clothing was an extremely valuable and limited resource in those days, and not something that was easily replaced. So, when they ripped their clothes to shreds, it spoke volumes. It was a way of physically expressing the pain they felt inside, a way of saying, "I am torn up. My heart is ripped to shreds."

The reader rips a piece of cloth.

Throughout worship, we want to offer you the space for lament and prayer. Scriptures and music will guide us through this time. Along the way, we'll offer you several opportunities to write down your laments on strips of paper. Cloth would be ideal but many of us don't have such cloth readily available. Therefore we are inviting you to have four sheets of paper handy to write on. One of the things we learn from reading the psalms and the prophets is that we don't have to protect God from our questions and cries. Our prayers don't have to be neat; they don't have to be nice, and we don't have to hold anything back. In this time of prayer, we'll also be inviting you to tear paper as a way to help us all remember what's been lost, what's been ripped and torn this past year...to help us mourn the things in our own lives and our world that can't be easily repaired or replaced.

When it is time to write down your prayers – you will hear soft music played. And then a sung response that you are welcome to sing if you like. If the time given is long enough, please just pause the recording and start again when you are ready. Let's begin.

Hymn: In the Quiet Curve of Evening 278 VU

Grieving What We Have Lost:

Reader 1: O God, your dream was of a world that was safe and life-giving. So we cry out to you, for this has not been our reality, especially in the midst of this pandemic. We cry out for all the lives lost this year—those known to us and those unknown, from the people down the street, to those across the world. We cry out for the loss of our wise ones and elders, the immune compromised, and all those for whom Covid should have been mild and non threatening but who have died because of its cruel grip. We grieve, as well, the loss of even being able to grieve in the ways we have before. We cry out because it's so easy to lose hope.

In the next few moments, we invite you to write down your laments for the many losses of life this year. You can write your laments on one of the pieces of paper.

music softly plays

Sung Response: Lord Listen to your Children Praying (400 VU)

Scripture and Reading

Reader 1: Hear these words from Psalm 13:

How long, O Lord? Will you utterly forget me? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall I harbor sorrow in my soul, grief in my heart day after day?

I invite you now to join me in tearing your piece of paper, the one on which you have just written your laments. (tearing)

Grieving What We Have Lost

Reader 2: God, you dream of a world where we can all be together in body and spirit to share meals and laughter and embraces. So, we cry out to you because that has not been our reality this year. We weep for the loss of relationships, for the loss of routine and normality and the ability to be physically together. We weep even for the loss of trust that the world is a safe, good place. We are in turmoil and peace seems like just a memory. In the next few moments of silence, we invite you to write down your laments for the loss of all those things we used to depend on and expect. You can write them on your next piece of paper.

music softly plays

Sung Response: Lord Listen to your Children Praying (400 VU)

Scripture and Reading

Reader 2: Hear these words from Jeremiah 8:

No healing, only grief; my heart is broken. Listen to the weeping of my people all across the land.

I invite you now to join me in tearing your piece of paper, the one on which you have just written your laments.

Grieving What We Have Lost

Reader 1: O God, you dream of a world where there's mercy and kindness and justice and joy, and enough to go around. So we must weep tonight for all the lives lost and hurt because of the racism and injustice and the fear of strangers and difference. We pray for all those pushed to the edge, who sleep on the street, who worry constantly about where their next meal is coming from, who fill our prisons, who are refugee who long for a family free of violence. The list of names is long. And somehow still keeps getting longer.

In the next few moments of silence, we invite you to write down your laments for the victims of the fear and hatred, greed and exclusion that continue to devastate our community, country and our world.

music softly plays

Sung Response: Lord Listen to your Children Praying (400 VU)

Scripture and Reading

Reader 1: Hear these words from Jeremiah 31:

A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

I invite you now to join me in tearing your piece of paper, the one on which you have just written your laments.

Grieving What We Have Lost

Reader 2: O God, you dream of a world where wrongs are acknowledged and righted and restoration is possible. So in this moment we must cry out to you and confess that we have too often ignored the wrongs in our country, our neighborhoods, our own hearts. But our eyes have been opened wider this year and what we see...hurts. It hurts and it's hard to confront what's broken within us and around us, and to find the courage to make amends and make things right. Hear our prayers and forgive us.

You are invited now to write down your confessions and prayers for forgiveness and change.

music softly plays

Sung Response: Lord Listen to your Children Praying (400 VU)

Scripture and Reading

Reader 2: Hear these words from Psalm 102:

God, listen! Listen to my prayer, listen to the pain in my cries. Don't turn your back on me just when I need you so desperately. Pay attention! This is a cry for help!

I invite you now to join me in tearing your piece of paper, the one on which you have just written your prayers.

Words of Assurance

Reader 1: We have gathered our ripped and torn hopes, our ragged laments. And look, torn small enough, the tiny pieces resemble confetti – ready to be flung into the air in celebration. In celebration of a God who will not let us go. In celebration of a love that can't be cancelled. A love that never fails. As we read in Romans 8: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So as we wait through all our dark nights, we remember God's immense and unfailing love for each of us and for this whole aching world—a love born in Christ on Christmas.

Let us pray: O God of big dreams, O God of big love, we look for you in this darkness of our despair, of our denial, of our disappointments. Even as we weep, we wait. And hope. And look toward Bethlehem. Help us, whether we can see you clearly or not, to follow you and to live your dreams—your fierce, brave, life-and joy-giving dreams—tonight and always. Amen

Hymn: # 74 MV When Painful Mem'ries – tune 44 VU

Blessing

Reader 2:

Go trusting that in this darkness, even now, seeds are growing, hope is being born, and new dreams are being dreamed.

Go in the embrace of the God of powerful love,
the Christ of humanness and vulnerability,
and the Spirit that is always, always with us and for us, Amen