

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.

*Reader 2: 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 Tamars' 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**

*Reader 2: This is the sound of our sorrow as we wait...and wait...and wait for God and for what's broken to be made whole. And yes, sometimes the wait seems so long - too long - and we feel like the writer of Psalm 22 who cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

**SUNG RESPONSE** "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

### **SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS**

### ***Grieving What We've Lost***

Reader 1: 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 cloth. 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.

*Reader 2: 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 loved ones we name in our hearts and in our minds this night. 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 of silence, we invite you to write down your laments for the lives lost this year. You can write your laments on one of the pieces of cloth you've been given.*

### **SCRIPTURE AND RENDING**

### **Psalm 13**

*Reader 2: 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 cloth, the one on which you have just written your laments.*

Reader 1: 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 cloth.

**Time for silence and written prayers.**

**SUNG RESPONSE** "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

### **SCRIPTURE AND RENDING**

### ***Jeremiah 8 & 31***

Reader 1: 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 cloth, the one on which you have just written your laments.

*Reader 2: 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 cloth, the one on which you have just written your laments.*

Reader 1: O God, you dream of a world where wrongs are acknowledged and righted and restoration is possible. So tonight 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.

**In this time of silence, we invite you to write down your confessions and prayers for forgiveness and change.**

**SUNG RESPONSE** "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

### **SCRIPTURE AND RENDING**

### ***Psalms 102***

*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 cloth, the one on which you have just written your prayers.**

## CANDLE LIGHTING

Reader 1: We light four candles tonight in honor of our loved ones. We light one for our **grief**, one for our **courage**, one for our **memories**, and one for our **love**.

*Reader 2: This candle represents our **grief**. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair. [Reader lights a candle; brief silence follows.]*

Reader 1: 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. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]

*Reader 2: 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. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]*

Reader 1: 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. [Reader lights a candle; a brief silence follows.]

*Reader 2: We light the **Christ candle**, remembering that Jesus Christ is always in the center of our lives. He hears our cry, he knows our hearts and, in the midst of all our thoughts and emotions, he offers us hope and healing. [Reader lights the Christ candle.]*

Reader 1: Let us pray. **Comforting God, wrap us in your presence in this time of remembrance. With these candles, help us find your light, a light that will guide us day by day, step by step, as we try to live life fully and wholly. We cherish the special ways in which we have been touched by our loved ones. We thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. Now comfort us, encourage us, empower us. Amen.**

## CLOSING PRAYER

### BLESSING

Leader: Go in peace, knowing that the God whose love created this world, sent Jesus into the same world to be our friend, companion, and Savior. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out!

**People: Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## COMMUNION

### POSTLUDE

“I’ll Fly Away”

Cathy Wilson, organ

# A Service of Light in the Darkness

December 16, 2020 - 6:00pm

### PRELUDE

“Lament”

Cathy Wilson, organ

### WORDS OF WELCOME

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Reader 1: Good evening, and welcome to Highland Presbyterian Church. Tonight is a night 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 light on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend everything’s all right, and to not go into ‘that dark place’.

*Reader 2: Yet we are here tonight in 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. Will you say that with me? Here we are.*

**All: We are in the dark.**

Reader 1: 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.

**All: We are in the dark.**

*Reader 2: We can hear in this night 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.*

**All: We are in the dark.**

Readers 1&2: And God is with us...we are not alone.

### SONG

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

Chris Jackson, tenor; Harriet McDonald, Cathy Wilson, singing bells

### SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS

*We Do Not Lament Alone*

Reader 1: Tonight, 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.