

The Longest Night

A service of reflection, comfort, and hope



Advent
AT BETHANY PRES

LONGEST NIGHT – THE DARK BEFORE THE DAWN

A service of reflection, comfort, and hope

December 21, 2021 - Winter Solstice

Please remember to silence anything that buzzes or beeps.

Welcome

Senior Pastor, Doug Kelly

Prayer From *Black Liturgies* by Cole Arthur Riley

God of the long and aching wait,
This year has swelled with the grief and loss and longing of many.
We want so much more than the present condition of this world.
Where are you? There are seasons when it becomes difficult to believe
in your nearness. Would you make it known to us now? That as we carry
each other through this season, we would find miracle in the mundane,
tiny sacred flashes of good as we wait for a healing that lasts.
Help us to dream. That we would find even our prayers grown large
in this season, asking for those things which we have deemed too good
or naïve. Help us to dream, not that we would pine for some mirage of
how things used to be, but that we would hold space for visions of life
where justice can breathe, where power is mobile, and where liberation
leaves no soul behind. Come, God. And we will wait.

Song Abide With Me

Transitional Director of Worship, Phillip Ferrell

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, O abide with me
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away
Change and decay in all around I see
O Thou who changest not, abide with me
I need Thy presence every passing hour
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me
I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me

Written by Henry Francis Lyte and William Henry Monk; CCLI#176696

PRAYERS REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Poem From *Here on Earth* by Anne Porter

Lynne Baab

The old man living in his rented room
Grows lonely as the night comes on
Especially in winter
And the boy shooting drugs
On the tenement roof
Is lonely whether or not
He has companions

Because the scatterer has overtaken us
Betraying promises, estranging lovers
Tearing us inwardly, and tearing us apart
One from another
And this is why those of us who are sated
Find it so easy to ignore
Those of us who are starving
And why we have been known
To torture one another
Why there are times
When we are far more cruel
Than the animals.

Nevertheless – taken all together
Or taken one by one
We are the holiest of all earth's creatures
For he who kindled the fire of the sun
He who draws out the tender leaves
From the dark twigs of winter
He who has whittled a cabin for the snail
Has also carved our names
In the palm of his hand
And He became a child, the better to be near us
Born in the wintertime
Born on a journey....



Prayer

Leader: Comforter,

We name and lament the losses associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. We have lost friends and family members. Many more suffer and grieve around the world. In our silence, we lament the tragic loss of life of each person made in Your image. Comforter,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Healer,

We have all been relying on the healing touch and listening ear of healthcare providers whose calling it is to walk alongside people in times of suffering and illness. Among us today are doctors, nurses, therapists, chaplains, specialists, and others whose lives have been disrupted, and vocations strained. Public health has been politicized. We lament and appeal to Your healing power to all those on the cusp of burnout... Healer,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Sustainer,

Our closest relationships, families, and children have suffered. We have not been able to meet together safely. We have been afraid of contracting the virus in our nursing homes, schools, or because of our compromised health conditions. Grandparents haven't hugged their grandchild in so many months. We lament the lost hugs of a special person in our life, the disappointment of cancelled celebrations, and the fear that has held us captive in this season... Sustainer,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Provider,

Our small businesses and workplaces have been impacted. We have had hours cut, positions eliminated. We have experienced our business dreams evaporate, had hours reduced and positions changed or eliminated. We have suffered from housing and food insecurities. We lament the lost dreams and financial stress of this pandemic.... Provider,

All: hear our prayer.

Silent Prayer

At this time, we invite you to silently name places of loss and longing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic this year. If you desire, you can come forward and light a candle as a visual reminder of God's presence in the darkness. If you'd like someone to pray with you, our prayer team is at the back of the sanctuary and is available to pray with you.

Song *Let It Fall* by Detweiler Linford Jerome

Phillip Ferrell and Marisa Gronholz

Have you been trying too hard? Have you been holding too tight?

Have you been worrying too much lately, all night?

Whatever we've lost, I think we're gonna let it go

Let it fall, like snow

'Cause rain and leaves

And snow and tears and stars

And that's not all my friend

They all fall with confidence and grace

So let it fall, let it fall

Have you been caring too much how this one ends?

You know it's not the kind of fight that you lose or win

When you're down so low, you feel the imprint of the ground

On skin, look around, breathe in *(Chorus)*

So let it fall, let it fall

Let It Fall lyrics © Scampering Songs Publishing, Music Rights Management Limited

PRAYERS FOR SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE

Poem From *Long Night Full Moon* by D.A. Powell

Milt and Metta Smith

You only watch the news to find out
where the fires are burning, which way
the wind is blowing, and whether
it will rain. Forecast ahead but first:

A mother's boy laid out
in the street for hours.

These facts don't wash away.



Prayer

Leader: Deliverer,

Be with those in power in our governments, give them vision and creativity as they work together to budget, plan, and offer laws which have real impact on real people whom you love. We lament the ways our systems and structures, both locally and nationally, do not always offer Your hope... Deliverer,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Liberator,

We lament the reality that so many across our world live under systems of oppression—racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia. We lament a justice system that, as Bryan Stevenson says, favors those who are wealthy and guilty over those who are poor and innocent. You are the God who sees and hears. We know that You hear the cries of the outcast, the downtrodden, those who are afraid... Liberator,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Forgiver,

We confess our complicity in racism and lament the ways we have contributed to and benefitted from unjust systems. We confess the things we have done and the things we have left undone. Forgiver,

All: hear our prayer.

Silent Prayer

At this time, we invite you to silently name places of injustice and oppression in our city, nation, and around the world. If you desire, you can come forward and light a candle as a visual reminder of God's presence in the darkness. If you'd like someone to pray with you, our prayer team is at the back of the sanctuary and is available to pray with you.

Song *Wait For the Lord*

Phillip Ferrell and Marisa Gronholz

Wait for the Lord whose day is near

Wait for the Lord; be strong, take heart

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PRAYERS FOR OUR PERSONAL LIVES

Poem *From Winter Landscape, With Rocks* by Sylvia Plath

Jenn Cavanaugh

Last summer's reeds are all engraved in ice
as is your image in my eye; dry frost
glazes the window of my hurt; what solace
can be struck from rock to make heart's waste
grow green again? Who'd walk in this bleak place?



Prayer

Leader: Rescuer,

Our need for you has never felt so desperate. We have spent another year lonely, bewildered, and anxious. Our world is uncertain, and our neighbors are understandably afraid. Save us, O Lord, from the toll this time has taken on us mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Rescuer,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Emmanuel—God with us,

We have lost much this year: loved ones, lifestyles, our sense of balance, security, optimism, and control. We feel alone in our grief, but we trust that it is not so. In life and death, Lord, abide with us. Emmanuel—God with us,

All: hear our prayer.

Leader: Lover of our Souls,

Whether we have been more isolated than ever, or constantly surrounded by people, we have felt rejected, misunderstood, unloved, unlovable. Hear and heal our hurts, Lord, as one who knows our inmost being. Comfort us as one closer than a brother.

All: hear our prayer.

Silent Prayer

At this time, we invite you to silently name places of loss and longing in your own life this year. If you desire, you can come forward and light a candle as a visual reminder of God's presence in the darkness. If you'd like someone to pray with you, our prayer team is at the back of the sanctuary and is available to pray with you.

Song *Winter Song*

Marisa Gronholz and Suzanne Mason

This is my winter song to you, the storm is coming soon

It rolls in from the sea

My voice; a beacon in the night, my words will be your light

To carry you to me

Is love alive?

They say that things just cannot grow, beneath the winter snow

Or so I have been told

They say we're buried far, just like a distant star

I simply cannot hold

Is love alive?

This is my winter song, December never felt so wrong

'Cause you're not where you belong, inside my arms

I still believe in summer days, the seasons always change

And life will find a way

I'll be your harvester of light, and send it out tonight

So we can start again

Is love alive?

This is my winter song, December never felt so wrong

'Cause you're not where you belong, inside my arms

This is my winter song to you, the storm is coming soon

It rolls in from the sea

My love a beacon in the night, my words will be your light

To carry you to me

Is love alive?

Reading *I Will Light Candles This Christmas*

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.

Individual Reflection and Prayer

Doug Kelly

A Blessing As You Go

A Blessing for the Longest Night by 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.

Resources for Support

If you could use some extra support this season, here are some resources available to you. Don't hesitate to reach out. You are not alone...

Pastoral Care at Bethany

Rev. Doug Kelly: dougk@bethanypc.org

Rev. Danielle Merseles: daniellem@bethanypc.org

Director of Congregational Care—Linda Cutshall: lindac@bethanypc.org

Director of Formation and Outreach—Marisa Gronholz: marisag@bethanypc.org

Bethany Partners specializing in mental health services:

- Samaritan Center of Puget Sound: www.samaritanps.org; 206-527-1009
- Unity Collective Counseling: www.unitycollectivecounseling.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: Text Hello to 741741

