

# *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*

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*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*

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### **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*

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*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](mailto:dougk@bethanypc.org)

Rev. Danielle Merseles: [daniellem@bethanypc.org](mailto:daniellem@bethanypc.org)

Director of Congregational Care—Linda Cutshall: [lindac@bethanypc.org](mailto:lindac@bethanypc.org)

Director of Formation and Outreach—Marisa Gronholz: [marisag@bethanypc.org](mailto:marisag@bethanypc.org)

### **Bethany Partners specializing in mental health services:**

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

