



Longest Night Service

December 21, 2015

6:00 pm

Jesus Justice Prayer Peace

* Indicates to rise in body or spirit

Gathering Music

Mandy Kjellstrom, Native American Flute

Welcome

Call to Worship

Leader: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

People: *The Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth.*

Leader: In him was life, and that life was the light of all.

People: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never been able to extinguish it.*

Opening Prayer

Holy One, we come to you this evening to acknowledge the “blue feelings” we are having at this time of year. Sometimes we even experience guilt because we have these feelings. The world tells us the Christmas season is supposed to be a time of joy and celebration and yet it can be some of the darkest times for us. We ask you to help us with these feelings and free us from worry. We ask that you heal our pain and remove our loneliness. Help take away the pressures of the season. And this year, please don’t let us be dragged into the darkness. May your light shine so that we can find our way.

People: *Amen. We wait upon God.*

Hymn #116 “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (verses 1-2, 5-7)

A Responsive Reading of Psalm 77 (The Message translation)

One Voice: I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs.

Many Voices: *God listens.*

One Voice: I found myself in trouble and went looking for God;
my life was an open wound that wouldn't heal. When friends said, "Everything will turn out all right, I didn't believe a word they said.

One Voice:

I remember God—and shake my head.
I bow my head—then wring my hands.
I'm awake all night—not a wink of sleep;
I can't even say what is bothering me.

One Voice:

I go over the days one by one,
I ponder the years gone by.
I strum my lute all through the night,
wondering how to get my life together.

Many Voices:

*Will God walk off and leave us for good?
Will God never smile again?
Is God's love worn threadbare?
Has God's salvation promise burned out?*

One Voice:

Has God forgotten all manners?
Has God angrily stalked off and left us?

One Voice:

"Just my luck," I said.
"The High God goes out of business just the moment I need my God."

One Voice:

Once again I'll go over what God has done,
lay out on the table the ancient wonders;
I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished,
and give a long, loving look at your acts.

Many Voices:

O God! Your way is holy!

No god is great like God!

You're the God who makes things happen;

You showed everyone what you can do—

One Voice:

You pulled your people out of the worst kind of trouble,
rescued the children of Jacob and Joseph.

One Voice:

Ocean saw you in action, God,
saw you and trembled with fear;
Deep Ocean was scared to death.

Many Voices:

Clouds belched buckets of rain,

Sky exploded with thunder,

your arrows flashing this way and that.

One Voice:

From Whirlwind came your thundering voice,
Lightning exposed the world,
Earth reeled and rocked.

One Voice:

You strode right through Ocean,
walked straight through roaring Ocean,
but nobody saw you come or go.

Many Voices:

Hidden in the hands of Moses and Aaron,

You led your people like a flock of sheep.

Now, lead us O God. Lead us into a season of peace and comfort.

Hymn #133

“O Little Town of Bethlehem”

A Reading from Isaiah 40: 6, 8, 27-31

Meditation “Removing the Wheels from Our Carts” Rev. Jerene Broadway

A Litany of Remembering with the Candles of the Advent Wreath

One: This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember. (Pause while the first candle is lit.) We remember their name, their face, their voice, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

All: *May God’s eternal love surround them.*

One: This second candle we light is to redeem the pain of loss; the loss of jobs, the loss of relationships, the loss of health. (Pause while the second candle is lit) We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God’s hands we receive the gift of peace.

All: *Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future.*

One: This third candle we light is to remember ourselves this Christmas time. (Pause while the third candle is lit) We pause and remember these past weeks and months; the disbelief, the anger, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the hugs and handshakes of family and friends, all those who stood with us. We give thanks for all the support we have known.

All: *Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.*

One: This fourth candle is lit to give light to our faith and the gift of hope which the Christmas story offers to us. We pause and remember. (Pause while the fourth candle is lit) We remember that God who shares our life also promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.

All: *Let us remember the one who shows the way, who brings the truth and who bears the light.*

Hymn #122

“Come, O Long-Expected Jesus”

Prayer (written by John Yoder, Guerillas of Grace)

One: O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons. In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold,

All: *teach us the lessons of endings;
 children growing, friends leaving,
 loved ones dying, grieving over, grudges over,
 blaming over, excuses over.*
O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

One: In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of beginnings;

All: *that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,
 a planting of seeds which bring to something right and just
 and different, In the fullness of your time.*
*what is ready to be born--
 a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love--*

One: O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

Hymn # 131 “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”

Final Reading “Keep Going” – read by Mandy Kjellstrom

Irish Blessing in Time of Sorrow:

May you see God’s light on the path ahead
When the road you walk is dark.
May you always hear,
Even in your hour of sorrow,
The gentle singing of the lark.
When times are hard may hardness
Never turn your heart to stone,
May you always remember

When the shadows fall—
You do not walk alone.
Amen.

Song

Sing once in unison, followed by three times in the round.

Gary will lead/teach the song from the keyboard.

“Go now in peace. Go now in peace. May the love of God surround you, everywhere, everywhere you may go.”



Please join us on Christmas Eve!

Thursday, December 24th at 6:00 pm

“All paths lead to Bethlehem” is the title of a children’s book and the theme of our Christmas Eve service. We will celebrate traditions and sing carols from around the globe as the whole world awaits Christmas morning. Communion will be served and children are encouraged to join us.

For Today’s Service

Greeters: Sharon Stepp and Linda Sanders

Readers: Greg Clemons, Judy Slater, Taleese Morrill

There will be no child care but there will be the activity bags for children to use.



Welcome! WE ARE...

*AN LGBT OPEN and AFFIRMING Congregation of the United Church of Christ
and a Just Peace Church.*

We are a progressive, risk-taking Christian faith community.

We follow the way of Jesus as the Christ and are welcome, open, and affirming to all.

We believe God is vibrant, alive, and still speaking to us!

We believe that God encourages us to engage the world through acts of mercy, peace, and justice.

**First Congregational UCC is located at 20 Oak Street in
downtown Asheville.** Please send all mail to PO Box 3211 Asheville, NC 28802.

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