

First Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
And
St Peter's Episcopal Church of Londonderry
Present

Blue Christmas

December 18, 2018 – Advent Year C



ALL ARE WELCOME

*“Friend, you enter this church not as a stranger, but as a guest of God.
Come, then, with joy in your heart and thanks upon your lips,
and offer God today your love and your service.”*

(Adapted from a 12th Century Church in Hampshire, England)

CENTERING MUSIC

WELCOME AND GATHERING

* Call to Worship

One: Remember the messengers of faith you have known.
Rejoice and give thanks for their witness.

**Many: We, too, will prepare the way of Christ;
we will help to level the hills and valleys of life.**

One: Hold one another in your hearts this day;
pray that love may rule all your relationships.

**Many: We will weep with those who weep.
We will rejoice with those who rejoice.**

One: God will be with you wherever you go. AMEN.

* Hymn #122 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus (verse 1, 4)

* Gathering Prayer (Unison)

God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. (Pause. Breathe. Continue.)

Help us to know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that you promise to all of your children through the gift of your son Jesus. AMEN. (You may be seated.)

Assurance of Pardon

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Those who dwell in the land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. In Him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Hymn # 128 In the Bleak Midwinter (verse 1, 2)

A LITURGY OF REMEMBERING

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

This first candle represents our **grief**. In this moment, we own the pain of losing a loved one, of dreams that go unfulfilled, or of hopes that evaporate into despair.

[Reader lights a candle; reads the first reading and then a brief silence follows.]

FIRST READING – Author Ann Weems

"Some of us walk into Advent tethered to our unresolved yesterdays the pain still stabbing; the hurt still throbbing. It's not that we don't know better; it's just that we can't stand up anymore by ourselves. On the way to Bethlehem, will you give us a hand?"

Silence

This second candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage it takes 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 the next candle; reads and then a brief silence follows.]

SECOND READING – Author Dom Helder Camara

In the middle of the night, when stark night was darkest,
Then you chose to come.

God's resplendent first-born sent to make us one.

The voices of doom protest:

“All these words about justice, love and peace—

All these naïve words will buckle beneath the weight
of a reality which is brutal and bitter, ever more bitter.”

It is true, Lord, it is midnight upon the earth,
moonless night and starved of stars.

But can we forget that You, the son of God, chose to be born precisely at
midnight?

Silence

This third 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; reads the reading and a brief silence follows.]

THIRD READING - From a prayer by Anselm of Canterbury

Jesus said, “Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” And so we invite each other to this time of peaceful remembrance.

Flee for a while from your judgment; Hide yourself for a little space from the turmoil of your thoughts.

Cast aside your burdensome sorrow and put aside your laborious grief. Thrust yourself upon the mercy of your God, and rest in God for a little while.

Silence

This fourth 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; reads and then a brief silence follows.]

READING - "First Coming" by Madeleine L'Engle

God did not wait till the world was ready, till nations were at peace.
God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release.
God did not wait for the perfect time.
God came when the need was deep and great.
God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.
God did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame, God came and God's Light would not
go out.
God came to a world that did not mesh; to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice, or to
share our grief.
God came with Love to touch our pain.
In spite of our tears we can for that rejoice.

Silence

COMMUNITY CANDLE LIGHTING

Let all who wish to light a candle to remember a loved one, to remember a loss,
to remember a relationship, come forward now to do so. Light a candle in
remembrance and as an act of remembering. Like our lives, each candle is in
darkness until it is filled by the light of Christ.

Hymn #116 O Come, O Come Emmanuel (verse 1)

PASTORAL PRAYER FOLLOWED BY SILENT PRAYER

One: These lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and
finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory
remains forever.

Many: **Let us remember that though Christ has gone before us he is ever
and always with us.**

Hymn # 99 Abide with Me (Vs. 1)

Benediction

Postlude

Presiders: The Rev. Colin Chapman, St. Peter's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Dr. Deborah Roof, Senior Pastor and Teacher, First Parish
Musician: Debbie Gline-Allen