**Blue Christmas/Longest Night Worship**

NPMC Adult Ed. – Dec. 22, 2019

*(Need: 4 candles and lighter, blue hymnals and pianist, oil)*

**Intro**

**Call to Worship**

**Hymn - HWB 182 – O How Shall I Receive Thee?**

**Psalm 22   
Litany of Remembrance – using HWB 172 – O Come, O Come, Immanuel  
Prayers of the People**

**Psalm 139**

**HWB 176 – Comfort, Comfort – anointing for those who wish**

**Blessing for the Longest Night**

**Psalm 121**

**Benediction**

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Introduction: **SUSANNE:** For the past three Sundays, we have heard stories of “Blue Christmas” – stories of mourning that leave us struggling to get through what is supposed to be a season of joy. We have heard that “Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other dis-ease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our congregations and communities.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**PATRICK:** So today we join other churches who have made a space to hold grief during this season, often close to the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, which was last night. This morning, as we read, pray, sing, and reflect together, let us hold space and recognize the burdens we carry. May this service be a place to name our sorrows and turn to our God, who is a God of healing and hope.

**Call to Worship**

***PATRICK:***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.  
What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.  
**SUSANNE: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

**Hymn - HWB 182 – O How Shall I Receive Thee?**

**Psalm 22**

PATRICK: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

**SUSANNE: O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,  
and by night, but I find no rest.**

P: In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

**S: It was you who brought me from the womb,  
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.  
Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.**

P: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

**S: God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.  
God does not hide from me.  
When I cry to God, God hears me.**

***P + S: Thanks be to God.***

**Litany of Remembrance – using HWB 172 – O Come, O Come, Immanuel**

*(Light first candle.)*

*P:* We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.  
We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.  
We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation,  
when all Creation waits for the Light.  
**S: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.**

***V. 1: O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear  
Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

*A period of silent reflection*

*The second candle is lighted.*   
  
*S:* We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss:  
loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.  
We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You,  
asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

**P: We remember that through You all things are possible.  
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

***V. 5: O come thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh.   
To us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in thy ways to go.  
Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

*A period of silent reflection + then The third candle is lighted.*

*P:* We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.  
We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens.  
We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.  
We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you,  
for all that we have suffered.  
We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, and in knowledge of our own mortality.

**S: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light,  
the light itself has not failed.  
We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be long,  
with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come.**  
***V. 3: O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.  
Rejoice, rejoice Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

*A period of silent reflection*

*The fourth candle is lighted.*

*S:* We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of hope that God offers to us in the story of Christmas,  
which also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of occupation and in a poor stable.  
We remember that the loving God who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**P: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to new Life,  
and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

***V. 6: O come desire of nations, bind all peoples in one the heart and mind.***

***Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease. Fill the whole world with heaven’s peace. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

*A period of silent reflection*

**The Prayers of the People – when we say “Lord, hear our prayer,” please respond with, “And in Your merciful love, answer”**  
*PATRICK:* God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain.  
As the nights have grown longer, so has grief grown and wrapped itself around our hearts.  
In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts --  
sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words.  
Lord, hear our prayer,  
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

*SUSANNE:* God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been.  
Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas.  
We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn.  
We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm. Lord, hear our prayer.  
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**

*PATRICK:* God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again.  
With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts.  
Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes.  
Lord, hear our prayer,  
**All: And in Your merciful love, answer.**  Amen.

**Psalm 139:7-12**

SUSANNE: Where can I go from your spirit?  
    Or where can I flee from your presence?  
8If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
    if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
9If I take the wings of the morning  
    and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
10even there your hand shall lead me,  
    and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
11If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
    and the light around me become night,”  
12even the darkness is not dark to you;  
    the night is as bright as the day,  
    for darkness is as light to you.

**P: There comes a time when we discover that God meets us in our grief, that our God is familiar with darkness. The Christ-child was born in the middle of the night, and in his life, he too wept and knew grief and loss. Though the Spirit of God seems distant from us in times of pain and sorrow, God is present with us even in the darkness. There is nowhere we can go where God is not. God’s love, healing, and hope are never far from us. What a comfort to our troubled hearts!**[[2]](#footnote-2)

**S: As a symbol of this comforting presence, of God’s healing and hope in all circumstances, let’s sing together HWB 176 – Comfort, Comfort. If you wish, you can come forward and Patrick or I will anoint you, touching your forehead with oil. Anointing is an ancient Christian symbol of healing.**

**Words of anointing:**

***May God’s healing presence embrace you in mind, body, and spirit.***

**P: Has everyone who wished received anointing? (Pause) Then hear this blessing:**

**Blessing for the Longest Night – by Jan Richardson**

P: 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.

S: 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.

P: 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.

[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Psalm 121 –** All read together from Psalters  
**I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
    from where will my help come?  
2My help comes from the Lord,  
    who made heaven and earth.**

**3He will not let your foot be moved;  
    he who keeps you will not slumber.  
4He who keeps Israel  
    will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**5The Lord is your keeper;  
    the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
6The sun shall not strike you by day,  
    nor the moon by night.**

**7The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
    he will keep your life.  
8The Lord will keep  
    your going out and your coming in  
    from this time on and forevermore.**

**SUSANNE: Benediction:**May God bless you and keep you; My the very face of God shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May God lift up the divine countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

1. See <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmaslongest-night-worship-with-those-who-mourn> Unless otherwise specified, prayers are adapted from “on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.” See <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmas-a-service-of-reflection-for-the-longest-night> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Use of Psalm 139 and prayer of comfort, Susanne Guenther Loewen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jan Richardson from [The Cure for Sorrow](http://janrichardson.com/books), <https://adventdoor.com/2011/12/19/winter-solstice-blessing-for-the-longest-night/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)