

LONGEST NIGHT_

A Service of reflection recognizing loss...

Messiah Lutheran Church

December 20, 2020

6:30 p.m.

P: While Advent and Christmas is a time of great festivity and joy for the majority of people within the Christian Community, it can be a particularly difficult time for people who may be grieving a loss – there are many this year, for those who are living alone because of loss or COVID, or those who have painful associations with this time of year – this is our gift to our faith community Messiah. If you have a candle or wreath of candles this service is wonderful with candlelight in your home church. If you have a little oil or simply a small bowl of water these elements may be used for anointing during the healing portion of this service. Most of all – welcome!

-WE GATHER-

OPENING WORDS

L: The light shines in the darkness. In the darkness when masks slip and grief is allowed to surface, when the chill of loss burrows its way into fragile and vulnerable souls exposed and bereft, light whispers:

C: love lasts forever.

L: In the darkness when memories taunt instead of comfort, when regrets triumph over achievements, light whispers:

C: love lasts forever.

L: In the darkness when confidence wanes and hope takes flight and faith is questioned, light whispers:

C: love lasts forever.

L: The light of love will carry us through the longest night.

GATHERING HYMN:

“Wait for the Lord”

ELW #262

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart!*

PRAYER

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Let us pray.

C: God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world’s celebration. 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 people through the gift of Jesus. Amen.

—WE HEAR WORDS OF HEARTBREAK—

HYMN

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Verse 1: Instrumental

Violin

**Verse 2: O Come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel.**

Reader 1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find not rest...I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast... (*Psalm 22:1-2, 14*)

Reader 2

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick...For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored? O, that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people! (*Jeremiah 8:18, 21-9:1*)

Reader 3

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. (*John 11:32-35*)

Silence...

–WE HEAR WORDS OF HOPE–

Litany of Remembrance

P: *Christmas wishes...brought to you by the Remiker, Rossing, Miller and Netzlof families of our congregation*

Reader 1 Remiker Family

My wish for you this Christmas is hope: the hope that things can be different, that the odds can be reversed, that justice can prevail, that we can see God turning cartwheels right in front of our eyes? Why? Because God is continually trying to attract our attention so that, even in the darkness of life, we can see flickers of hope.

C: Disperse the gloomy clouds of night.

Reader 2 Rossing Family

My wish for you this Christmas is peace: not that wee moment of darkness when all is quiet and you can take a breath, but peace that is deep and lasting, that seeps in to everything you do, changing your perception, calming your fear, letting you relax as you have never done before.

C: Death's dark shadow put to flight.

Reader 3 Miller Family

My wish for you this Christmas is love: the love that came in the form of a baby born in poverty and seen as a threat to political stability—that kind of love—not sentimental or slushy, but grounded in the reality of a harsh and brutal life, fighting for survival, succeeding against the odds, making all the difference; love that perseveres because love is of God.

C: Refresh the hearts that long for you.

Reader 4 Netzlof Family

My wish for you this Christmas is joy: joy that ripples right to your toes, not the easy smile you wear or forced cheerfulness you perform, but a joy that bubbles up from the depths lifting your spirit, sending you soaring, leaving you reeling and breathless; the joy of God incarnate.

C: Restore the broken: make us new.

And with these gifts of hope and peace and love and joy, God fills us to the brim so that we can overflow into the world around us, being Christ to each other, seeing Christ in each other and serving even the least of these.

**C: O Come, O Dayspring, come and cheer
O Son of Justice, now draw near
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadow put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel.**

Reader 1

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. ⁸Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. ¹⁰For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

(Isaiah 25:6-9)

Reader 2

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

(John 1:5)

Reader 3

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying

and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’

(Revelation 21:1-5)

-WE RECEIVE A HEALING TOUCH AND A PROMISE-

If you have a small dish of oil or water, we will use this now for a healing touch, remembering our baptismal promise of God’s presence in all parts of our lives...

Service of Healing

P: Our Lord Jesus healed many as a sign of the reign of God come near and sent the disciples to continue this work of healing—with prayer, the laying on of hands, and anointing. In the name of Christ, the great healer and reconciler of the world, we now entrust to God all who are in need of healing.

Prayer

P: God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks for freeing your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to new life through healing and prayer. Pour your Holy Spirit upon those who gather here: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence.

C: Amen.

A: God the Creator, your will for all people is health and salvation.

A: Jesus, you modeled the gift of love through healing and desiring that all might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

A: God the Spirit, you make our bodies the temples of your presence.

A: One God, in you we live and move and have our being.

A: Lord, grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured, or disabled, especially that they may be made whole.

A: Grant to all who serve, your guidance, and to all who are lonely, anxious, or despondent, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

A: Mend broken relationships and restore those in emotional distress to soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

All: Hear us, O Lord of life.

SONG

“Come and Fill Our Hearts”

ELW #528

**Come fill our hearts with your peace, you alone O Lord are holy.
Come fill our hearts with your peace, Alleluia!**

Laying on of Hands

Ministers of Healing: *(Name) in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, be strengthened and filled with God's grace, that you may know the healing power of the Spirit. Amen.*

CLOTH FOR THE CRADLE

-WE PRAY AND LIGHT THE CHRIST CANDLE-

Pondering at the Cradle...

Pastor Mark Petersen

P: *Let us pray:*

Comforting God, wrap us in your presence in this time of remembrance. With these cloths, help feel your swaddling presence that will encourage us day-by-day, step-by-step as we try to live fully and holy. We cherish the special ways our loved ones have touched us. We thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. Now comfort us. Encourage us. Empower us.

C: ***Amen.***

SENDING SONG: "All I Want for Christmas is You"

-WE ARE SENT-

FOCUS ON CANDLES OF HOPE, PEACE, LOVE AND JOY

P: May God bless us and those we love – particularly those we have recalled during this service through the days ahead. And until we all meet again may God hold us in the palm of God's hand.