

The Spirit is breathing.
All those with eyes to see,
women and men with ears for hearing
detect a coming dawn;
a reason to go on.
They seem small, these signs of dawn
perhaps ridiculous.

All those with eyes to see,
Women and men with ears for hearing
uncover in the night
a certain gleam of light;
they see the reason to go on.
-Dom Helder Camera, *It's Midnight, Lord*

The Service of the Longest Night
December 21, 2023 | Service of Worship 6:00pm, Zoom
Pilgrim Congregational Church, United Church of Christ



PILGRIM
Congregational Church



UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



**Welcome to Pilgrim Congregational Church,
United Church of Christ
A Welcoming, Open and Affirming Congregation**

Statement of Welcome

*We honor the Biblical call to love one another
as God first loved us. We welcome into the full
life and ministry of the church all people of
any race, nationality, religious background,
educational
background, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual
orientation, marital status, economic status,
and physical, mental, and emotional abilities.*

Mission Statement

*A welcoming home to all spiritual seekers
Making a difference in our world,
By fusing our Christian faith with
everyday life and Serving God
by serving others.*

Children at Pilgrim

Children are an important part of our worshipping community. We try to make them feel at home!

All are welcome. Professional childcare for infants and toddlers is available in the nursery from 10:15 to the end of the service.

Please note: The video of this service is posted online. If you prefer not to be filmed, please sit near the rear of the sanctuary.

Visual and Hearing Aids

Hearing devices may be picked up from the table in the narthex.

Large Print bulletins and Sermons texts are available.

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PRELUDE

Prelude II in C minor - JS Bach

GREETING

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night," darkness is not dark to you, O Lord; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. *Psalms 139:10-11*

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

OPENING PRAYER

God of mercy, hear our prayer in this Advent season for ourselves and for all who live with grief, fear, anxiety, or painful memories. We gather out of darkness to pray together for your gifts of courage, patience, and peace. We ask these things in the name of your Christ, who shares our life in sorrow and joy, death and new birth, despair and promise. Amen.

HYMN

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem 376

Do - na no - bis pa - cem, pa - cem. Do - na
no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.
Do - na no - bis pa - cem. Do - na
no - bis pa - cem. Do - na no - bis pa - cem.

**May be sung as a canon*

WORDS: Trad. Latin
MUSIC: Trad.

DONA NOBIS PACEM
Irr.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

FIRST CANDLE – GRIEF

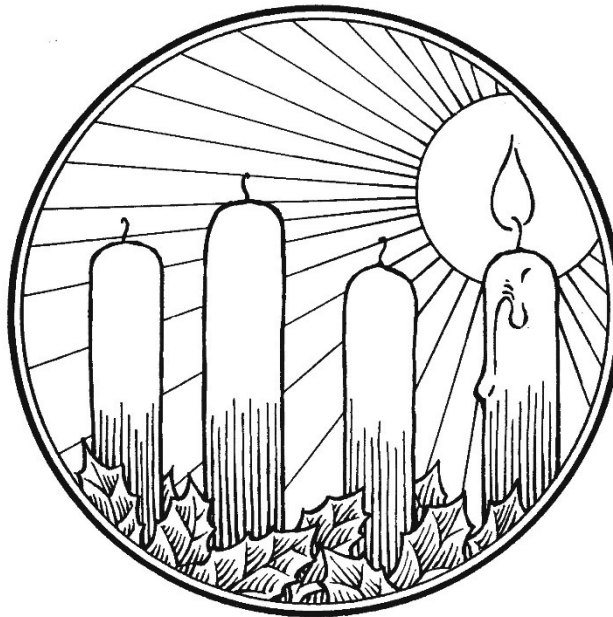
ONE: This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

ALL: **May God's love surround all who mourn and struggle with grief.**

MUSICAL RESPONSE

"In the Bleak Midwinter," verse 1

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter, long ago.



SECOND CANDLE – COURAGE

ONE: This candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage 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.

ALL: **Refresh, restore, renew us O God, and lead us into your future with great Courage.**

MUSICAL RESPONSE

“In the Bleak Midwinter,” verse 2

Our God transcends all heaven, earth, and its domain; heaven and earth shall flee away when Christ comes to reign; In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed the sovereign God almighty Jesus Christ.



THIRD CANDLE – MEMORIES

ONE: This 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.

ALL: **Holy one, help us to remember the light-filled joyful memories, as we struggle with the dark memories.**

MUSICAL RESPONSE

“In the Bleak Midwinter,” verse 3

Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the midnight air; But his mother only, in her maiden bliss, worshiped the beloved with a kiss.



FOURTH CANDLE – LOVE

ONE: This 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.

ALL: **Guide us, O God, as we remember all that has been given and received in you whom we know as Love.**

MUSICAL RESPONSE

“In the Bleak Midwinter,” verse 4

What can I offer, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a Wiseman, I would do my part; but what can I offer—all my heart.



A TIME OF PRAYER

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

ONE: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. On this 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, in your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: God of healing - as flu, and RSV, and CoVid all impact family and neighbors, we pray for healing. We pray for courage and grace for health care workers. We pray for those who are isolated by disease. As we continue through such uncertainty and loss, we pray for your strength and courage to continue onward.

Lord, In your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: God of peace - we pray for our siblings and neighbors devastated by war. We pray for your peace which surpasses all understanding. We pray for truce, for ceasefire, for humanitarian pause, for just peace, however we name it we pray for the devastation of war to stop. We cry out in horror and grief for every human life lost to intractable war this season. For the people of Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Myanmar...we cry out. In the bleakness of war, may we all feel surrounded by your peace, your love, and your hope. Lord in your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: 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 remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life. We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone. 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, in your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through this Christmas season. We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden, that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace.

Lord, in your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: 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, in your mercy,

ALL: Hear our prayer.

ONE: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We give you thanks, comforting God, for wrapping us in your healing presence in this time of remembrance. We praise you for your guiding light, each day, as we try to live life more fully and wholly. Now, by your sacred, healing power: comfort us, encourage us, empower us. Amen.



A CASCADE OF HOPE

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.

~ Jan Richardson

THE PEACE

ONE: Peace be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

ONE: Let us share the peace of Christ with one another.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Meditation on 'Silent Night' - arr. Larry Shackley

SOURCE NOTES

Liturgy for Lighting the Advent Candles and Reflections adapted from Ministry Matters: Longest Night by Nancy C. Townley. Liturgy for the Prayers of the People based off an order of worship used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii.

