

Welcome!

This time of prayer and praise,  
scripture and silence is a time:  
*to come* together in God's presence;  
*to express* the reality of loss, grief, fear,  
anger and confusion that are a normal part  
of living and loving;  
and *to pray* for the hurting places in our own lives,  
our nation and our world.

In worship, we will ask God for healing,  
and become again, ever so gently,  
ready to face a future sustained by hope and grace.

### SERVICE of COMFORT & HOPE

**PRELUDE** Jens Bartel

### WELCOME & CALL to WORSHIP

One: Good afternoon and welcome to this service of  
Comfort and Hope.  
Tonight is a night for us to be together in the dark.  
But, let's admit it, so often darkness scares us.  
We've been taught to fear it, to avoid it, to keep the  
lights on, to think happy thoughts, to pretend  
everything's all right, and to not go into "that dark  
place."

Yet we are here tonight in the dark because  
God created light and dark,  
Day and night... and said both were good.  
To fear darkness is to miss what we can see there  
that we can't see clearly anywhere else.  
So, here we are.  
We are in the dark. Will you say that with me?  
Here we are.

All: **We are in the dark.**

We are here to acknowledge we are in the dark  
about so many things:  
We have so many unanswered questions.  
We have so much fear and sorrow we can't make  
sense of—tucked away in secret places.  
And for some of us,  
we have fresh grief that's raw and feels unending.  
Here we are.  
**We are in the dark.**

We can hear in this night an invitation to not run so  
quickly to the bright shiny objects, to easy answers,  
and loud, well-lit rooms. This sacred darkening makes  
room for all of who we are—for our laments and  
longings, our confessions and our cries. This darkness  
can help us see what we cannot see in the light. This  
dark and holy night can perhaps even be a night  
where dreams are dreamed, hope can be born. Here  
we are.

**We are in the dark.  
And God is with us...we are not alone.**

**SONG of COMFORT** – *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

### GATHERING PRAYER

**God of grace,  
we come to you for you are the source  
of life and comfort.  
Take away the busy-ness and  
drive to distraction in this season.  
Turn what lies behind it,  
our grieving and our uncertainty,  
into peace for what has passed –  
and hope for what is to come. Amen.**

**A READING from SCRIPTURE** – Psalm 130

### SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS

**SONG of COMFORT** – Kent Peterson

*For You, O Lord, My Soul in Stillness Waits (vs. 1-2)* #89

O Lord of Light, our only hope of glory,  
your radiance shines in all who look to you;  
come, light the hearts of all in dark and shadow.

*Refrain*

*For you, O Lord, my soul in stillness waits,  
truly my hope is in you.*

O Spring of Joy, rain down upon our spirits;  
our thirsty hearts are yearning for your word;  
come, make us whole, be comfort to our hearts.

*refrain*

**A READING from SCRIPTURE** – Isaiah 43

**SONG of COMFORT** –

*For You, O Lord, My Soul in Stillness Waits (vs. 3-4)* #89

O Root of Life, implant your seed within us,  
and in your advent, draw us all to you,  
our hope reborn in dying and in rising.  
*refrain*

O Key of Knowledge, guide us in our pilgrimage;  
we ever seek, yet unfulfilled remain;  
open to us the pathway of your peace.  
*refrain*

### SHARING OUR PRAYERS & LAMENTS

**A READING from SCRIPTURE** – Psalm 13

**SONG of COMFORT** –  
*For You, O Lord, My Soul in Stillness Waits (vs. 5-6)* #89

Come, let us bow before the God who made us;  
let every heart be opened to the Lord,  
for we are all the people of God's hand.  
*refrain*

Here we shall meet the Maker of the heavens,  
Creator of the mountains and the seas,  
Lord of the stars, and present to us now.  
*refrain*

**A READING from SCRIPTURE** – Romans 8

**A READING from SCRIPTURE** – Luke 4:16-21

**SONG of COMFORT** – *In the Bleak Midwinter* #144

In the bleak mid-winter, 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 mid-winter, long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign:  
in the bleak mid-winter a stable place sufficed  
the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

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

What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him: give my heart.

#### TIME of PRAYER

**CONCLUDING READING** – *Even in the Night*  
by St. John of the Cross

**SONG OF COMFORT** – *Silent Night* #122

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright  
'round yon virgin mother and child!  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight;  
glories stream from heaven afar,  
heavenly hosts sing "Al-le-lu-ia:  
Christ the Savior is born;  
Christ the Savior is born!"

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love's pure light  
radiant beams from thy holy face,  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth

Silent night, holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light;  
With the angels let us sing Al-le-lu-ia to our King:  
Christ the Savior is born;  
Christ the Savior is born.

#### BLESSING

#### POSTLUDE

(Liturgy adapted from prayers by Lenora & Gary Rand |  
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When a friend offers to walk with you in the darkness, it is a sacred moment indeed. When Barbara Brown Taylor started to write a book on darkness, a friend invited her to explore Organ Cave. As one of the largest cave complexes in the country, Organ Cave stretches for almost forty miles below the earth's surface.

After acclimating their senses to the subterranean world, Taylor and her two friends walked, crawled and climbed their way through a series of chutes and small spaces until they came to a rather large room. Taylor made her way to the far end of that area where the ceiling slanted down to a low tunnel filled with rocks.

When Taylor sat down and reached to turn off the light, a thousand fractals of light caught her eye. She looked up and saw a thin fissure of rock filled with tiny crystals. Even the smallest ray of light appeared to dance when it fell on the crystals.

Taylor spotted a few crystals that had broken off and fallen to the floor. She chose one that glittered brilliantly and carefully placed it in her backpack. Then she turned off the lamp and sat in the darkness.

In her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor shares the following reflection while sitting deep in the heart of Organ Cave: *I let this sink in: new life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.*

*...new life starts in the dark.* These may be the most hopeful words for us deep Advent and on the threshold of winter solstice.

Back in her room after exploring the cave, Taylor found the crystal with eager anticipation and held it up to a reading lamp. Under that bright light, the stone appeared pigeon colored and no more unique than a piece of road gravel. No brilliant light show.

Taylor realized that the stone was not the problem. The light was the problem. Searching through her backpack, she found a penlight. She clicked on the penlight while turning off all the other lights. The small beam of the penlight transformed the stone into a diamond factory, as dazzling and radiant as in the cave.

*The stone is alive, Taylor writes, but only in the dark. ...When I entered the cave hoping for a glimpse of celestial brightness, it never occurred to me that it might be small. But here it is, not much bigger than a mustard seed – everything I need to remember how much my set ideas get in my way. While I am looking for something large, bright, and unmistakably holy, God slips something small, dark, and apparently negligible in my pocket.*

In pockets, in shadow filled valleys, in wintertime...*new life starts in the dark.*

In the darkness of this season, let us walk with our brothers and sisters in faith as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Light of the Word, the birth of Emmanuel – God-with-us.

- Gratefully, Pastor Lawrence

## CHRISTMAS SERVICE of COMFORT & HOPE

*A Community Service at Christmas for Grieving,  
Praying, and Healing*



**Sunday, December 20, 2020**



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