

“A Blue Christmas”
2019

Gathering Music (Norma)

Welcome

Good evening, everyone. And welcome.

You are a brave bunch of people. You are brave to be here tonight. It takes courage to come to a service like this... it takes courage to admit that you are not having a perfectly holly-jolly Christmas... it takes courage to own up to the fact that you don't have it all together, that you need help.

Here is what we say to each other every Sunday morning at St. Paul's, and it applies here tonight just as much as it does on Sundays:

No matter who you are, and no matter where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

We say that because, after all, this is not St. Paul's Church, but because this is God's church. We believe that God is here, that God is alive, that God is at work, and we believe that it is God's welcome, God's love, that surrounds you now. We pray that you would know this deep in your bones, and when you go from this place, we pray that you would take it with you, into the darkness.

I invite you to stand if you are able, and join me in these ancient words from the book of Job.

Call to Worship (see bulletin) – excerpted from Job 6

Hymn “O Come O Come Emmanuel” (see bulletin for words)

Reading of Scripture (see back of bulletin, Connie can read or a lay reader can read)

Reflection

I'm so glad you have come here tonight. I don't know exactly what brings all of us here, but I do know we're here for all sorts of reasons.

Some of us are here because we've lost someone we love – maybe it was recently or maybe it was decades ago – but many of us are here tonight have lost someone, and right now, especially during this holiday season, there is a big hole that they have left behind, and no one else in the world can fill it in. Maybe we're here for them.

Or maybe we're here because although someone we love hasn't died, it sure *feels* like they have – maybe they've been slipping away for years, and it feels like they're already gone. Maybe we're here for them.

Or maybe we're here for our children or grandchildren. Maybe we're worried about our children or grandchildren – worried for their health or safety or the partners they've chosen or maybe we simply wonder why they've stopped coming to church. Maybe we're here for them.

Or maybe we're here for our parents. Maybe we are anxious about what the upcoming years are going to look like. Where will they live? Who will take care of them? Maybe we're here for them.

Some of us came here tonight for ourselves. Maybe we're facing medical tests, health scares, unexplained pains in our bodies. Maybe we feel ourselves growing older, and we're starting to worry about our *own* futures – who will take care of us?

Maybe we're here because our marriage is just not working out. Maybe we're here because our lives are being torn apart by addiction. Maybe some of us are here because of a job loss. Maybe some of us are struggling with depression, anxiety, sleepless nights. Maybe we are here for ourselves.

I have to be honest here: I don't know why things can be so hard sometimes. I don't know why we have to suffer.

But I do know this: we are not alone in our suffering. We are not alone in any of it. When we come together like this, we know we are part of a larger community. We can look around, and see the others. We can see each other, and know we are not alone.

But not only do we have each other, we have God. In Jesus Christ, we have God. Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God-with-us, God-in-

the-flesh, has come into the world as one of us, has come into all our suffering, and has taken it on. He has taken on all of it.

Especially this time of year, we remember how God was born flesh of our flesh. Especially this time of year, we remember how God chooses to be born into the messiness of humanity... into a dirty old barn, into a homeless family, into rejection, loss, grief, sorrow, fear, anxiety, pain, emptiness. We remember that it's into all *this* – all this humanness – that God comes, and dwells among us.

And we remember that in Jesus Christ, we have a promise: God has been where we are. God has been to the depths. God knows grief, sorrow, suffering, and pain. God with us, Emmanuel, knows what it feels like to be human. God knows it all, God's been through it all, even death. And God has lived to tell about it.

You may be having a Blue Christmas this year. You may be grieving. You may be in pain.

If so, know this: you are not alone. There are others, others right here in this community, who have grief too. You are not alone. There are others; and there is God. God is in this with you. God has been there before. And God will be there again, and again, as many times as it takes to show you that you are not alone; that in life and in death, you belong to God.

In life and in death, we belong to God. In joy and in sorrow, God is with us. Emmanuel.

Maybe that is enough.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" (see bulletin for words)

Prayer

Let us pray. Around us, O God, we hear voices singing: 'Joy to the world...let heaven and nature sing.' But we don't always feel like singing. Our minds are not at ease...we feel too much doubt. Our hearts are not at peace...there is too much to do. Our souls are not warmed...the chill of death is too troubling.

On this cold night, in this dark time, we pray for all who are hurting...

We pray for the lonely, that they might find comfort in another's touch...

We pray for the downtrodden, that they might find relief from their burdens...

We pray for those wrestling with depression, that a light of calm might bring them peace...

We pray for those dealing with stress, that they might find the courage to let go...

We pray for the grief-stricken, that they might experience the newness of life that you bring...

To every aching heart, for every frozen mind, amidst our streaming tears, draw near, O God, with tender comfort and unshakable love.

May joy come to the world, O God—a joy that runs deep, a joy that sustains us even in moments of despair.

We wait for You, Emanuel, God With Us, to come into our hearts once again. May we experience your love in new ways as we turn in love to each other.

We pray all this in the name of the One who is to come. Amen.

Response “O Come O Come Emmanuel” (see bulletin for words)

Blessing

As you go out into the world, out into the darkness, know that God is with you. God holds you, and will not let you go. May you know that you are never alone. And may you be filled with peace. Amen.