

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020
7:00 PM

SAINT GILES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP

Reader 1: Tonight is a night for us to be together in the dark. But, let's admit it, so often darkness scares us. Darkness is our nightmare. 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."

Reader 2: 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.

Reader 1: 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.

All: We are in the dark.

Reader 2: 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.

All: We are in the dark.

Reader 1: And God is with us...we are not alone.

SONG # 86 *The People Who Walked in Darkness* verses 1 & 2

*The people who walked in darkness
awaken to see a great light.
The people who dwelt in the land of the shadow
rise to a star shining bright.*

Refrain:
*His name is Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God,
Father forever, Prince of Peace.*

*For God has enlarged the nation,
and prospered the fruit of its land.
God's people are blest with the harvest of victory,
gift from a bountiful hand. (Refrain)*

GRIEVING WHAT WE HAVE LOST

SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 8:18-22

My joy is gone, grief is upon me,
my heart is sick.
Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:
“Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?”
 (“Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?”)
“The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”
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?

One of the things we learn from reading the psalms and the prophets is that we don't have to protect God from our questions and cries. Our prayers don't have to be neat; they don't have to be nice, and we don't have to hold anything back. As the music is played we are invited to write down some of the things we have lost this year.

MUSIC

SUNG RESPONSE *Have Mercy on Us*

Sandra McCracken

*Have mercy on us
Have mercy on us, O Lord
Have mercy, O Lord
Have mercy*

*Oh help my unbelief
Oh help my unbelief, O Lord
Have mercy, O Lord
Have mercy*

SHARING OUR LAMENT

RACISM AND INJUSTICE

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 58:6-9

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator^(a) shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, here I am.

Our God dreams of a world where there's mercy and kindness and justice and joy, and enough to go around. So we must weep tonight for all the lives lost and hurt because of the racism and injustice and the fear of strangers and difference in this country. The list of names is long. And somehow still keeps getting longer.

MUSIC

SUNG RESPONSE

Have Mercy on Us

Sandra McCracken

***Have mercy on us
Have mercy on us, O Lord
Have mercy, O Lord
Have mercy***

***Oh help my unbelief
Oh help my unbelief, O Lord
Have mercy, O Lord
Have mercy***

SHARING OUR LAMENT

WE DO NOT LAMENT ALONE

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain^[a] in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

One of the things we learn from scripture is that God also laments. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that God has a scroll filled with God's own handwritten words of grief and sorrow. So, we do not lament alone. Tonight we lament and hear the comforting words that our God never leaves us and loves us as beloved children.

MUSIC

SUNG RESPONSE

Have Mercy on Us

Sandra McCracken

*Have mercy on us
Have mercy on us, O Lord
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*Oh help my unbelief
Oh help my unbelief, O Lord
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SHARING OUR LAMENT

WORDS OF PROMISE

Hear these words from Romans 8: “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So as we wait through all our dark nights, we can remember God’s immense and unfailing love for each of us and for this whole aching world—a love born in Christ on Christmas. Let us pray: O God of big dreams, O God of big love, we look for you in this darkness of our despair, of our denial, of our disappointments. Even as we weep, we wait. And hope. And look toward Bethlehem. Help us, whether we can see you clearly or not, to follow you and to live your dreams—your fierce, brave, life-and joy-giving dreams—tonight and always. Amen.

SONG # 86 *The People Who Walked in Darkness* verses 4 & 5

***For us now a child is given,
for all the despised and forlorn.
The rule of compassion shall rest on his shoulder.
God’s own Messiah is born!*** (Refrain)

Refrain:
***His name is Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God,
Father forever, Prince of Peace.***

***How vast is our God’s dominion!
How far truth and mercy extend.
The zeal of the Lord will accomplish its purpose:
justice shall reign without end.*** (Refrain)

BENEDICTION

Go trusting that in this darkness, even now, seeds are growing, hope is being born, and new dreams are being dreamed. Go in the embrace of the God of powerful love, the Christ of humanness and vulnerability, and the Spirit that is always, always with us and for us, Amen.

POSTLUDE *In the Bleak Midwinter*