

Paul's Episcopal Church Canton, Ohio



Thursday, December 19, 2024

6:00 p.m.

Loss, Healing, and Hope: A "Blue Christmas" Service

Gathering as God's People

Prelude

"Still, Still, Still" by Philip Ledger

Greeting and Call to Worship

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

All around us, lights are lit and carols play.
The season heaps joy upon us.

Yet, we who come here, we carry more than joy;
we carry loss, worry, grief and pain.

We come weary, seeking rest from expectations.
We also seek a holy presence to be with us.

We come to this place, by the resilient grace of God:
love that never lets go.

Hymn: "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow"

1950

Ira Stanphill

$\text{♩} = 180$ C

I don't know a-bout to - mor-row, I just live from day to day.
Ev-'ry step is get-ting brighter, As the gold - en stairs I climb;
I don't know a-bout to - mor-row, It may bring me pov - er - - ty;

⁹ C F C D7 D7 G7

I don't bor - row from its sun-shine, for its skies may turn to gray.
Ev-'ry bur - den's get-ting light-er, Ev-'ry cloud is sil - ver lined;
But the one who feeds the spar-row, Is the one who stands by me.

17 G7 C C7 F C

— I don't wor - ry o'er the fu - ture, for I know what Je - sus said;
 — There the sun is al - ways shin - ing, There no tears will dim the eye,
 — And the path that be my por - tion, may be through the flame or flood,

25 C F C C G7 C

— And to - day I'll walk be - side Him, For He knows what lies a - head.
 — At the end - ing of the rain - bow where the moun - tains touch the sky,
 — But His pre - ence goes be - fore me, And I'm cov - ered with His blood.

34 C7 F C D7 G7

Man - y things a - bout to - mor - row I don't seem to un - der - stand; But I

43 C F C G7 C

know Who holds to - mor - row, And I know who holds my hand.

Prayer of Approach

We gather this night, to remember...
 those who have touched our lives,
 glad memories and happy stories,
 and love that we hold dear.

We name those who have been life itself to us.

We gather in the name of Jesus,
 vulnerable as an infant,
 joyful and happy as a youth,
 wise and caring as an adult.

We gather in the presence of God, who brings life and light to all.

All life is precious in God's sight.
No one is ever alone or forgotten.

Come, let us gather in the Spirit of hope and peace.
We worship, in the name of joy and love. Amen.

Hymn #662: "Abide With Me"

1 A - bide with me: fast falls the e - ven - tide;
 2 I need thy pres - ence ev - ery pass - ing hour;
 3 I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
 4 Hold thou thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes;

the dark - ness deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide:
 what but thy grace can foil the tempt - er's power?
 ills have no weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness.
 shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;

when o - ther help - ers fail and com - forts flee,
 Who, like thy - self, my guide and stay can be?
 Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy vic - to - ry?
 heaven's morn - ing breaks, and earth's vain sha - dows flee;

help of the help - less, O a - bide with me.
 Through cloud and sun - shine, Lord, a - bide with me.
 I tri - umph still, if thou a - bide with me.
 in life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

Call to Confession

Dear Lord, we come to you this day to express our failures and confusion regarding our relationship with you:

You know that we come to you with heavy hearts that we find hard to unburden. It is particularly at this time of year when the darkness of long solstice nights collide with the brilliance of Christmas lights, that we find it hard to express our losses.

We may be confused, sad, lonely, and feeling our losses without remembering that you are always there to support us. We tend even toward anger at you, Lord, because we feel in some way it is your will that we are unhappy. Sometimes we feel cut off from you because we allow our many hurts to engulf us. We lack trust in you.

Open us to the understanding that you are the source of all love and we need not feel so alone in our grief. Grant us wisdom to know that you—most of all—can be trusted, and that you are with us, especially when we are at our absolute worst.

Assurance of Pardon

Let us open our lives to God's healing presence and receive our Lord's acceptance of us!

We know, God of Love, that you are always with us even in our very darkest of times. We know that you forgive our many transgressions and that by leaning into your infinite patience and strength, we receive your mercy, your care, and your grace today. *Amen.*



Listening for God's Promise

Losing One We Love

Isaiah 40:1, 6–8

Prayer

Holy One, you are with us in times of trouble and in times of peace;
in times of sorrow and times of joy.

When we are unsure of how to continue living and loving,
your Spirit intervenes with sighs too deep for words.

Speak for us now, Loving God.

Comfort us with your abiding peace... (*silence*)

Verse 1 “Healing River of the Spirit” (Beach Spring) (VF #96)

Healing and Memory

Psalm 139:7–12

Prayer

God of all, when we feel alone, you draw nearer;
when we lose our footing, you guide us toward a good path.

Through the ages, you have promised to be a comfort to your people,
and you call us to be a comfort to others.

In all our living, may we never lose the memory
of our most cherished relationships,
and may we feel the courage and strength you offer to us
through those who surround us... (*silence*)

Verse 2 “Healing River of the Spirit” (Beach Spring) (VF #96)

Living with Hope and Love

John 14:1–4, 18–19

Prayer

God of hope and joy, you prepare our hearts for renewal.

You till the soil of our lives and nurture small shoots of possibility.

Even when we are unsure, you repeat your promise:

I will never leave you.

Open us, Holy One, to your promise.

Hold us in your care.

Strengthen us for your future.

Guide us in anticipation and faith... (*silence*)

Verse 3 “Healing River of the Spirit” (Beach Spring) (VF #96)

Remembering in Hope

Vocal Solo: “Bright Morning Stars” (Shaker Song)

Verse 1: "Bright morning stars are rising,
bright morning stars are rising,
bright morning stars are rising;
day is a-breaking in my soul"

Verse 2: "Oh, where are our dear fathers?
Oh, where are our dear fathers?
They're down in the valley praying;
day is a-breaking in my soul"

Verse 3: "Oh, where are our dear mothers?
Oh, where are our dear mothers?
They've gone to heaven shouting;
day is a-breaking in my soul"

Verse 4: "Oh, where are our dear children?
They're upon the earth a-dancing;
day is a-breaking in my soul"

“The Paschal candle is central to our worship tonight because it represents Christ’s journey from death to resurrection and reminds us that every one of us makes this journey, too. At this time, you may light a candle from the Paschal Candle in memory of a loved one to honor their journey from death to new life.”

The Rev. Canon Adrienne Koch: Canon for Mission and Transformation

Ceremony of Commemoration

All are invited to come forward to light their candle. You will be invited to call out the names of those whom you want to remember during a period of libation.

We light a candle in memory of those who gave us birth,
who nurtured us, offered love, and cherished us.

**We remember mothers and fathers,
guardians and grandparents,
and all our family through the ages.**

We light a candle in memory of those
who have been joined to us in the great circle of family.

**We remember sisters and brothers,
aunts, uncles, and cousins,
those near to us and far away.**

We light a candle in memory of those who have left us
before we expected, those we hold dear,
and with whom we still walk in our dreams.

**We remember children and grandchildren,
those who leaped within the womb
and who danced upon the earth.**

We light a candle in memory of those whom we came to know through the eyes of love.
We hold sacred the faces and memories of years past,
of those who brightened our days and lit up our lives.

**We remember husbands and wives,
dearest loves and closest friends,
who changed our lives forever.**

We light a candle in memory of those who shared in our lives
in many ways, who worked with us
and made our lives more enjoyable.

We remember friends and neighbors.

We light a candle for those we do not know, O God,
who, like us, have suffered loss, who live with grief,
who long for peace and justice,
who long for friendship and healing.

We remember your people, of every time and place.

Finally, we leave one candle unlit,
mindful of the great truth of this life,
that in the fullness of time we, too,
will join our loved ones in a realm without sorrow and pain,
in the company of Unending Love.

**For these and all your children, we give thanks
for life, hope and courage. *Amen.***

Going in Peace

Song: "Go Now in Peace" (VF #166)

1 2

Go now in peace, go now in peace, may the love of

3

God sur-round you ev-ery-where, ev-ery-where you may go.

ORFF INSTRUMENT PATTERNS

1 Alto Glockenspiel 2 Metallophone 3 Alto Xylophone 4 Bass Xylophone

Reflection

Thank you all for being here this evening to honor your loved ones and support one another. Please feel free to depart when you're ready, there's no rush to leave. You may depart when you feel ready. We appreciate your presence and support during this time of remembrance.

Blessing

Life is short, and we do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us, so be quick to love and make haste to be kind. And may the blessing of the One who made us, the One who loves us, and the One who travels with us, be with you and those you love this day and always. *Amen.* — *Henri-Frédéric Amiel*

Improvisation on a Shaker Song

Participants in Today's Liturgy:

Priest-in-Charge:	The Rev. Dr. Robin Woodberry
Director of Music:	Edward T. Grimes
Lectors:	Demetrius Carrothers, Jeff Nowlin, Carol Sutek
Greeter:	M.L. Schultze, Rick Senften
Crucifer:	Douglas Colmery
Camera/Audio:	David Lewis
Altar Guild:	Barb Anderson

Purpose of the Service

“A Blue Christmas service offers people a sacred space to not only remember their loved ones who have passed, but also to name their losses and griefs from the previous year, or maybe to recognize their disappointments or loneliness or fears. It is a refuge, of sorts. A way to acknowledge that they are not alone in the midst of their hurt. That others are hurting, too.

It's about making space for the sadness that is already there. Naming it. Honoring it, even. Taking it to Christ. And yes, remembering the hope we have in Him. It can be so incredibly powerful for someone who is grieving or going through a difficult season. You know, several years ago, when I was on staff at a church, we had lost a really loved member of our church family, of our staff, and it was right before Easter and there were those in the church who didn't want to celebrate Easter. It was hard. They were grieving. It was a devastating loss. And I knew that and felt it.

But I also knew that we couldn't stay there. And I was talking to a couple of other staff members about it and, referring to Hebrews 10:23, I wrote to them, “Let us hold unswervingly to our hope... and keep encouraging those around us to do the same. We WILL celebrate Easter. We must. Jesus is our only hope. Without Him, we are lost. So cling tight. Don't let go. We will pray our people through this time. We will be like our Good Shepherd... bandaging the injured, caring for the weak until they are strong again, rescuing those caught in dark places. And we do so with gentleness. Steadiness. Love. Hope.”

Just as we had to honor our community's loss, we still needed to find a way to cling to the hope we have in Christ. And that is what a Blue Christmas service does.”³

Kari Bartkus



NAVIGATING THE HOLIDAYS

Jesus & Your Grief

Jesus reaches us at our point of need. He ministers to us personally, meeting our unique needs. If you have difficult questions, He will listen and guide you to the hope and truth of God's Word. If you simply need to weep in God's presence, the Lord will be with you and carry your burden.

In your grief, what do you need today? Maybe, like Martha, you need to be reminded of God's promises – to be grounded in His truth. Perhaps you need to reflect on one of the following passages from God's Word:

- *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* (Psalm 23:4, 6 ESV)
- *“You have seen my troubles, and you care about the anguish of my soul.”* (Psalm 31:7 NLT)
- *“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”* (Psalm 34:18)
- *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”* (Revelation 21:4).

Or maybe, like Mary, you need to weep. You need God's presence and the compassionate, listening ear of Jesus, who is *“a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief”* (Isaiah 53:3 NLT). Perhaps you need to share memories of your loved one and cry out to God. If that's you, then pour your heart out to Him. The Lord hears you. He listens. He cares about your loss and your tears. He's your refuge in your grief.

“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” (Psalm 62:8)

You Don't Grieve Alone

Friend, we do not grieve alone or without hope. We have God's Word to keep us grounded and give us hope. We also have God's presence and the support of His people to comfort us. Through His Word, His Spirit, and His people – the Lord bears our burden of grief and walks with us each day.

“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.”
(Psalm 68:19) ⁴

A Light Through the Dark

In this season of joy, there's a silence we know,
A grief that we carry, where shadows still grow.
The holidays sparkle, with laughter and cheer,
But hearts are still aching, for those who aren't near.

Yet, in this deep sorrow, take solace and rest,
For God holds your tears, in His mercy and best.
He walks with the broken, the ones who still mourn,
And tenderly holds us, as we feel forlorn.

The warmth of His love, like a candle's soft glow,
Will light up the darkness, and gently bestow
A peace that transcends all the hurt and the ache,
A promise of healing, for His own namesake.

Though seasons may change, and time slowly flies,
The One who has loved you will never disguise
His presence, His comfort, His arms open wide,
Through all of your grief, He will be by your side.

So this Christmas, though pain may weigh heavy and long,
Know you are cherished, know you belong.
For in every tear, every prayer that you speak,
God's love is eternal, for the wounded and weak.

May His peace fill your heart, this season and more,
And lead you to hope, where sorrow once tore.
For in Him, there's healing, in Him, there's light,
Guiding you gently through this silent night.⁵



Resources

1. **Jean Givens, PHN leadership team member.** *Blue Christmas: A Service of Wholeness and Healing.* Presbyterian Parish Nurse Seminars (Santa Fe Seminar).
2. **The United Church of Canada.** *Loss, Healing, and Hope: A "Blue Christmas Service".* 2016; originally posted on AdventUnwrapped.ca.
3. **Kari Bartkus.** *Offering a Blue Christmas Service to Honor the Loss and Cling to the Hope.* <https://lovedoesthat.org/offering-a-blue-christmas-service-to-honor-the-loss-and-cling-to-the-hope/>.
4. **Dustin Anderson, Th.M.** Lead Writer, Hope for the Heart. <https://www.hopefortheheart.org/>.
5. **ChatGPT.** *A Light Through the Dark.* OpenAI, 18 Dec. 2024.