The Longest Night

A service of remembrance

St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church

our mission is to be Jesus Christ’s heart, hands and feet to our neighbors no matter where they are on their journey of faith.
~A Service for the Longest Night~

Words of Welcome
Welcome to this “Service for the Longest Night.” Most of us are here because we have experienced losses this year that make it hard for us to celebrate Christmas. We are surrounded by Christmas sounds, sights, smells, and excitement, yet we find ourselves having difficulty getting into the “spirit” of the season. We may be reeling from many different kinds of losses – the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, divorce or loss of a relationship, economic hardships, the loss of our health. Any one of these losses will involve grief, and so we come here tonight, grieving, asking, “Why Lord?” and “Lord, help me, please.” We invite you to participate as much as you are able – sing, pray, join us as we bring our grief and pain to the manger. We trust that you will find hope, peace, and comfort in knowing that you are not alone.

Call to Worship
from Emmanuel and St. Aiden’s Episcopal Churches

Reader: Tonight, we gather here in this place of refuge,
People: for we grieve, we are lonely, we are afraid.

Reader: Tonight, we gather daring to wonder if God has indeed come in Jesus,
People: discerning the rejection we have known, intimate with our failed relationships, holding our heartache in hands of tenderness.

Reader: Tonight, we gather with neighbors and strangers, a family made one by our brokenness,
People: coming with our hearts full of hope and our pockets filled with questioning.

Reader: Tonight, we gather, just as we are,
People: for God has promised to meet us here and to welcome us for whom we are.

Collect (From Elizabeth Kaeton)
Let us pray. O God of abundant mercy, you have given us grace to pray with one heart and one voice, even though our hearts tremble with grief and sorrow. Comfort, comfort, Lord, your holy people. Comfort those of us who sit in darkness, mourning beneath our sorrow’s load. Speak to us of the peace that awaits us, of the balm of healing for our weary and wounded souls. We ask all this, trusting in the promise you have made to hear the prayers of two or three who have gathered in the name of your Holy Child, Jesus. Amen

Lessons of the Day

Isaiah 9:2-4, 6-7
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Hymn #668  I lift mine eyes unto the hills
Gospel

Luke 2:8-20
In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"
When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Homily

The Rev. Scot McComas

Advent Wreath Candle Lighting and Litany of Remembrance
from Emmanuel and St. Aiden's Episcopal Churches

Leader: We light this Advent candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season which anticipates Christmas.
People: May God’s eternal love surround them.

Leader: We light the second candle to redeem the pain of loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our open hands, you will place the gift of peace.
People: Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, the pain of reflecting on our mortality.
People: Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.

Leader: This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope which God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time of no more pain and suffering.
People: Let us remember the one who shows the way and who goes with us into our tomorrows.

The Peace
Offertory

At this time, people are invited to come forward and light a candle in remembrance of their losses, whatever they may be.

Choir Anthem: In the Bleak Mid-winter
Congregation may be seated

Eucharistic Prayer B found in the Book of Common Prayer p. 367

Communion

All are welcome to receive at the Lord’s table.
For those who would like to receive a gluten-free wafer,
please cross your hands palms-down.

Anyone desiring prayers for healing and anointing with holy oil (unction) may come to the altar rail at this time. All are welcome to come forward to pray for those receiving unction.

Hymns #67 Comfort, comfort ye my people
#111 Silent Night

Post-Communion Prayer:
Prayer for the Night from A New Zealand Prayer Book, 184

Lord, it is night.
The night is for stillness.
   Let us be still in the presence of God.
It is night after a long day.
   What has been done has been done;
   what has not been done has not been done
   let it be.
The night is dark.
   Let our fears of the darkness of the world and our own lives
rest in you.
The night is quiet.
   Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
   all dear to us, and all who have no peace.
The night heralds the dawn.
   Let us look expectantly to a new day,
   new joys
   new possibilities
In your name we pray. Amen

The Blessing

Hymn #66 Come thou long expected Jesus

Dismissal: Go forth in the name of the promised Christ.
People: Thanks be to God.
A Blessing for the Longest Night

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;

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.

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