

**First Congregational United Church of Christ
Grand Marais, Minnesota
Blue Christmas Service
December 11, 2022 – 4:00 pm**



“There is a candle in our hearts, ready to be kindled. There is a void in our souls, ready to be filled.”

Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi, 13th century Persian poet

Welcome to this time when we can, with others, acknowledge the “blue” feelings we have at Christmas time. For many who have lost a loved one, this can be a time of sharp loneliness. For others, who have lost a relationship, health, job, or had a financial setback, it may be a time of anxiety, confusion, or fear. In this season that carries a mix of feelings, we gather as a community of support for one another.

GATHERING MUSIC

WORDS OF WELCOME

READING:

“In the Bleak Midwinter” Poem by Christina Rossetti

*In the bleak midwinter, 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 midwinter long ago.*

*Our God transcends all heaven, earth, and its domain
Heaven and earth shall flee away when Christ 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,
Worshipped 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.*

READING:

“The Guest House” by Rumi

This human being is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,

Some momentary awareness comes

As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,

Who violently sweep your house

Empty of its furniture.

The dark thought, the same, the malice,

Meet them at the door laughing,

And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,

Because each has been sent

As a guide from beyond.

MUSIC

A TIME OF REMEMBERING: The First Candle is lit...

Reader: The first candle we light to remember those we have loved and lost. Human family and friends; beloved companion animals. We pause to silently remember their names, their faces, their voices, the memories that bind them to us in this season.

Pastor Enno: We gather together to remember our friend, Rev. EvaLyn Carlson, who left us this past year. We thank God for her friendship, her ministry, and her leadership in our community. Let us take some time for sharing stories about her...

Reader: Blessed are those who mourn...

ALL: For they will be comforted.

The Second Candle is lit...

Reader: We light this second candle to remember the wide variety of loss in our lives: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We pause to gather up the pain of the past and offer it to God, asking that from God's hands we receive the gift of healing.

Blessed are the meek...

ALL: For they will inherit the earth.

The Third Candle is lit...

Reader: This third candle we light is to remember those near and far who reach out to us in this Christmas season. We acknowledge the frustrations, the down times, the poignancy of reminiscing, the empty places at our tables. We remember the listening ears, the hugs and the encouragement from family and friends, all those who stand with us. We acknowledge the emptiness of those who have not received listening ears, the hugs, and the encouragement from family and friends.

Blessed are the merciful...

ALL: For they will receive mercy.

The Fourth Candle is lit...

Reader: We light this fourth candle to remember the gift of light and hope offered to us in sacred stories from this time of year. We remember the indigenous stories of Winter Solstice, of the sun seeming to stand still in the sky and the darkness filling the longest night. Then slowly, new life and joy springing forth with the promise of growing hours of sunlight.

Blessed are the pure in heart...

ALL: For they will see God.

The Fifth Candle is lit...

Reader: We light this fifth candle to remember and honor those who have been involved in mass shootings, hate crimes, and those who have stood up for democracy and freedom for all. We honor those in Ukraine who strive for freedom from invasion and those in Iran who strive for equal rights for women.

We remember the nativity story from the Christmas tradition, where a migrating and homeless couple takes shelter in a stable among animals. Giving birth to a baby, the family is visited by strangers who follow the light of a star, and help them evade the persecution of an evil ruler. The baby grows to spread healing, justice, and peace that will change the world.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

ALL: For they will be filled.

ALL: We remember the Holy One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light, and who journeys with us through all our darkness.

OFFERING OF LIGHT – You are invited to light a candle in your place in memory of someone, or of a concerning situation.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

All around us are the sights and sounds of Christmas, Gentle God: the laughter of parties, the songs of carolers, the shouts of children sledding down hills, the music in every store. But deep within us we carry our pain. Our grief walks with us every step we take. Loneliness is a shawl we drape over our shoulders on empty nights. So, in this time when every night stretches into eternity, we come to you, bringing our gifts: not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but grief, bitterness, and loss.

Though we come from different backgrounds, families, and faith traditions, we have all lived in the land of shame and wandered the far country of despair. We have stood on the side of every room we have gone into, hoping against hope that someone would ask us to dance but finding the wall is our only friend.

In a season when so many people don't have enough hours in a day to get their lists checked off, their cards mailed, their presents wrapped, we have all the time in the world: to remember the loss that has stolen the joy of the season; to grieve over a job, a dream, a loved one; to sit in the shadows of our homes, too weary to turn on the lights; to wander the streets lit by lights on all the houses, but not by the Light of the world.

Our fear of the future, our remembrance of the past, our pain that is difficult to bear and harder to release, our emptiness which cannot be filled with platitudes, our hands which cannot hold the ones we wish to embrace: all make this a season of long nights.

Be with us in our loneliness, in our longing, in our loss, and in our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray; amen.

MUSIC

SCRIPTURE READINGS – Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 (Hebrew Scriptures) John 1:1-5 (New Testament)

MEDITATION – TIME OF SILENCE AND REFLECTION

MUSIC #127 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming (New Century Hymnal)

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1 Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As saints of old have sung.
It came, a flower bright
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night

2 Isaiah had foretold it,
 The Rose I have in mind:
 With Mary we behold it,
 The virgin Mother kind.
 To show God's love aright
 She bore to us a Savior
 When half-spent was the night

BENEDICTION

In your silence, may the Word dwell in your heart.

In your brokenness, may the Bread of Life heal you.

In your pain, may the One who can heal touch your soul.

Amen.

POSTLUDE