

Blue Christmas Worship Service

The Fourth Week of Advent

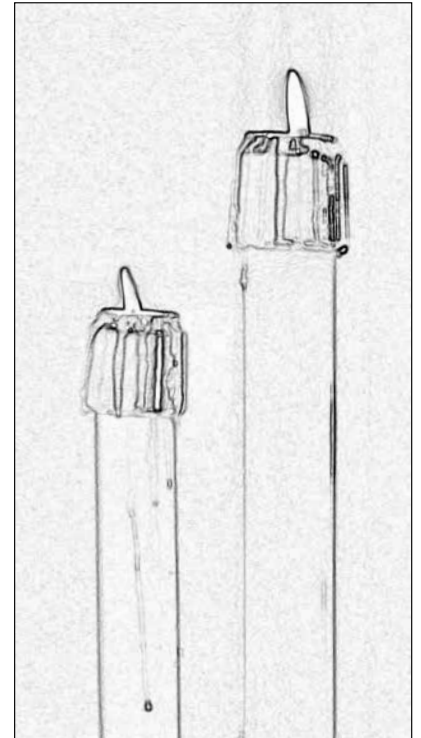
Thursday, December 20, 2012

Buchanan Chapel

I will light candles this Christmas;
Candles of joy despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,

Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

Howard Thurman



Gathering

Call to Worship (*Psalm 13:3–6*) (unison)

One: Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;
lest my enemy say “I have prevailed over him”; lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

All: **We come to you, O Lord, seeking answers to our questions.
We come to you, O God, because you are the Creator.**

One: But I have trusted your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

All: **We come looking for a song to sing;
we wait for your voice to call us from beyond our fear.**

Opening Prayer

***Song** "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Words of Welcome

Psalter Psalm 22:1–5, 9–10 (*congregation sings the refrain and reads responsively*)

Refrain

Leader: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from my help, and from my cry of distress?

People: **O my God, I cry out in the daytime, but you do not answer.
At night also, but I get no relief. (*sung refrain*)**

Leader: But you are the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of your people.
Our ancestors trust in you: they trusted and you delivered them.

People: **They called to you and were rescued: they put their trust in you
and were not disappointed. (*sung refrain*)**

Leader: But you are the one who took me out of the womb:
You kept me safe upon my mother's breast.

People: **On you have I been cast ever since I was born:
and you are my God even from my mother's womb. (*sung refrain*)**

Poem

Scripture Reading Matthew 11:25–29

(page 11, N.T.)

Meditation by Judith L. Watt

Song "There Is a Balm in Gilead"

A Liturgy of Remembering

Leader: We light this candle to remember those persons who have been loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice. We give thanks for the memory that binds them to us this season that anticipates Christ.

(Pause while the first candle is lit)

People: **May God's eternal love surround them.**

Leader: We light this second candle to redeem the pain and loss: the loss of relationships, the loss of jobs, and the loss of health. As we gather up the pain of the past, we offer it to you, O God, asking that into our welcome hearts and open hands you place the gift of peace.

(Pause while the second candle is lit)

People: **Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into your future.**

Leader: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmastime. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and, for some of us, years of down times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the hurts, and the pain of reflecting on our own mortality.

(Pause while the third candle is lit)

People: **Let us remember that dawn defeats darkness.**

Leader: The fourth candle is lit to remember the children and adults lost in Newtown, Connecticut. We remember their names, their loved ones, their innocence. We struggle to hold onto your promises, O God, in the face of such tragedy.

(Pause while the fourth candle is lit)

People: **Let us remember that the darkness of evil cannot overcome your light of love and redemption.**

Leader: This fifth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope that the Christmas story offers us. We remember that God, who shares our life, promises us a place and time when suffering and pain will be no more.

(Pause while the fifth candle is lit)

People: **Let us remember the One who shows the way, who brings the truth, and who bears the light.**

(We leave the Christ candle unlit as a sign of waiting for a future that is yet unknown to us, from which God beckons us.)

Moment of Silent Reflection and Prayer

Pastoral Prayer

Song "Silent Night, Holy Night"

Closing Prayer

O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons. In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of endings; children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying, grieving over, grudges over, blaming over, excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.
In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of beginnings; that such waitings and endings
 may be the starting place,
a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—
something right and just and different,
a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us the sense of your timing. Amen.

(A prayer from Guerrillas of Grace by Ted Loder)

Feelings of grief over losses can be heightened at this time of year. Expectations for the holidays can be different from the realities. Such experiences need not be dealt with alone. Fourth Church's Lorene Replogle Counseling Center offers various resources and a supportive environment for reflecting on, exploring, and coping with such experiences. To learn how the Counseling Center can help, call the Center at 312.787.8425.

Grief support groups are offered throughout the year by the Counseling Center and are designed to enable those undergoing significant loss and leave-taking experiences to help one another deal with grief. John Boyle and other members of the Counseling Center staff lead the groups, for which there is no fee.

Intercessory prayer provides opportunity to pray with a Deacon following the 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday services. This time of prayer takes place in Stone Chapel. Prayer concerns can also be written on prayer cards available outside Stone Chapel, in the Narthex, and in Anderson Hall and left for a Deacon to pray.

A New Year's Eve Service in the style of Taizé will be held on Monday, December 31 at 7:30 p.m. in Buchanan Chapel. This service of meditative song, prayer, and a period of silence offers time for reflection as one year draws to a close and a new year begins.

Worship Leaders

Judith L. Watt	Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care
Robert Ryder	Member of Fourth Presbyterian Church and Deacon
Anna DeVries	Member of Fourth Presbyterian Church
Carol Carpenter	Song leader
Thomas E. Gouwens	Associate Organist

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