

“The Inn – Room to Grieve”

December 13, 2021 Blue Christmas Service

The Inn: Housing the Holy series

WELCOME

Welcome to this Blue Christmas Service. For many, this time of year that we call the “holiday season,” is no holiday at all. It is filled with difficult times, humps to get over, gatherings to endure, varieties of pressures and a flood of memories that darken and dampen the short days and long nights. This season is not a happy time for everyone. When others are going “merrily along,” many of us would rather the season just go away.

Tonight, we make room to acknowledge where we are right now. We make room to simply be, to sing, to listen, to pray, to feel God’s presence, and maybe to just be still. We’re invited to offer up our pain, loneliness, difficult and wonderful memories, and our anxiety and fear and offer them to the One whose birth we eagerly await - Jesus the Christ. It is our prayer that we all will find hope and peace in this service - and comfort in knowing that we are not alone.

Tonight, also falls very close to the longest night of the year, so we remember the power of light to dispel darkness. Throughout Advent, this season before Christmas, we proclaim hope, love, joy, and peace in the midst of difficulty. Our faith story is grounded in the presence of God, who came and dwelt among us in the midst of hardship. But it’s important to name that sometimes hope, love, joy, and peace are distant feelings when we have encountered loss. I pray that this is holy space and safe space for us to come to God just as we are and offer our hearts – in prayer, in song, and even in silence.

MEDITATION – “Room to Grieve”

The Light changes everything. It doesn’t mean that there isn’t pain, grief, loss, and struggle, but it does mean that we don’t go through it all alone. The promise of Christmas – the birth of Jesus – isn’t that the hard stuff of life is gone or that it doesn’t affect us – because it does. It means that we can be honest that we need room to grieve – and that there is comfort in the midst of our grief.

Tonight, we come here for different reasons. Some of us are grieving the loss of a loved one through death. Some are grieving other losses – strained relationships or divorce, job loss, financial struggles, illness and the prospect long healing for ourselves and others. We may be feeling the strain and grief of the reality of violence in our world, praying for those who have endured natural disasters and are displaced even recently, or feeling the collective grief and exhaustion of a global pandemic. The losses can feel like they’ve multiplied, and those feelings are real. We can be overwhelmed, and it’s vital that we acknowledge it – admit that it’s hard – so that we can mourn it and find

some hope. Even as we gather before the longest night, the longest night promises that the daylight will increase.

So, we mourn and grieve – the loss of life, remembering those who are beloved with love and joy, and we pray for comfort and peace.

So, we mourn and grieve – the loss of livelihood, knowing that many are struggling to find security in the basics – food, shelter, medical care, and more. We know that dreams have been deferred, passions dampened, and purpose have been compromised, and there are many needing help who have never needed it before. We pray for sustenance and resilience.

So, we mourn and grieve – the loss of love, the struggles to end hatred, racism, injustice and oppression, the reality of violence and brutality, and the inability to love another despite our differences. We pray those who work to proclaim justice – and we pray for compassion and change that makes this world more like God’s Kingdom.

So, we mourn and grieve – the loss of liveliness, knowing that for some of us, energy and enthusiasm are hard to come by these days. We pray for those who are caregivers for others – healthcare workers, teachers, and more. We pray for those who struggle with mental health concerns and find it difficult to claim hope right now. We pray for those affected by suicide, and the pain they carry. We pray for those who are struggling with addiction – and for those who surround them with care, hope, and help. We pray for those who are in abusive situations. May God remind us that each person is beloved as we pray for recovery and renewed spirits.

So, we pray for many losses, and it’s in the midst of all of these prayers that the Light comes into the world. The Light changes everything. The Light of the World came in the flesh to be with us. As we’re in our setting here, in this holy and humble space like where Jesus was born, it’s a reminder that Christ comes in the tenuous and not altogether glorious place. He comes in the messiness, and there’s comfort in that if we’re willing to claim it.

And every year when we come to Blue Christmas, Emmanuel is the word that offers me comfort. Emmanuel – God with us – is the promise that Jesus knows our full humanity, and that includes our grief. Jesus knew grief – real grief when a friend died and when the people didn’t understand his mission and ministry.

In truth, the reality of Jesus’ birth is that pain and uncertainty surrounded everything that happened to him, even from the very beginning. It wasn’t a silent and solemn night. It was rough. Jesus came into a messy world, and still, he comes into a messy world – every day. So, we gather to acknowledge that in our own lives while knowing that the birth of our Savior connects to our own humanity. God understands

the reality of grief, loss, pain, and struggle. God knows it because God lived it. God cares about it. And God cares about us.

My prayer for all of us is that we know that truth: God cares about us. God knows what it means to be human, to feel grief, to live it, to carry it. The promise is that God also helps us to carry it. We don't carry it alone.

AMEN.