

Quispamsis United Church

December 21st, 2022 - Longest Night/Blue Christmas Service

Liturgical Colour: Blue/Purple

Presider: Rev. Richard Bowley

Musicians: Wendy Stewart & Sue King

GATHERING TOGETHER

Opening Music

Lighting of Affirm Candle

Acknowledgement of Territories

Words of Welcome

As we gather for this longest of nights for our blue Christmas service, we do so like those who wait for the dawn, who long for the light. This whole season of Advent has been about us fighting the darkness in our world and in our lives, in ourselves with light, the light of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love, tiny flickering candles with the strength to push back the veil of the dark. Tonight these candles will stand for something else as together we push back the darkness of despair..

Welcome this night, whoever you are, wherever you are. This place is not just sacred, it is safe. A place where we can offer up our brokenness, our loss, our grief, and find support in one another and in God.

Call to Worship (Responsive):

Remember the messengers of faith you have known, rejoice, and give thanks for their witness.

We, too, will prepare the way of Christ; we will help to level the hills and valleys of life.

Hold one another in your hearts this day; pray that love may rule all your relationships.

We will weep with those who weep. We will rejoice with those who rejoice.

God will be with you wherever you go.

AMEN.

Hymn:

Come and Find the Quiet Centre

VU 374

**Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,
Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see
All the things that really matter, be at peace and simply be.**

**Silence is a friend who claims us cools the heats and slows the pace
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being face to face,
Making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
Raising courage when we're shrinking finding scope for faith begun.**

**In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain
Let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain
There's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care
In the Spirit's lively scheming there is always room to spare!**

LISTENING FOR TRUTH

Centering Prayer:

God of love and understanding, we gather here this evening to confront our pain in the midst of the world's celebration. Help us know that you are present with us in all of our moods and feelings and seasons. Grant us a taste of the hope, peace, joy, and love that you promise to all of your people through the gift of your son Jesus. AMEN.

Scripture Readings & Reflection

Luke 14:15-24:

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner." '

Reflection

Matthew 11:28-29:

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Reflection

Revelation 7:15-17:

For this reason, they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Reflection

Hymn:

It Came Upon A Midnight Clear
It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth,
to touch their harps of gold,
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heaven's all-gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

VU 44

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled;
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;
and warring humankind hears not
the love song which they bring.
O hush the noise and cease your strife,
and hear the angels sing.

**For, lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.**

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Wreath Lighting Liturgy

We light four candles tonight in honor of our loved ones. We light one for our grief, one for our courage, one for our memories, and one for our love.

This candle represents our grief. We own the pain of losing loved ones, of dreams that go unfulfilled, of hopes that evaporate in despair.

[first candle lit. Silent reflection]

This candle represents our courage. It symbolizes the courage to confront our sorrow, to comfort each other, to share our feelings honestly and openly with each other, and to dare to hope in the midst of pain.

[light second candle. Silent reflection.]

This candle represents our memories. For the times we laughed together, cried together, were angry with each other or overjoyed with each other. We light this candle for the memories of caring and joy we shared together.

[light third candle. Silent reflection.]

This candle represents our love. The love we have given, and the love we have received. The love that has gone unacknowledged and unfelt, and the love that has been shared in times of joy and sorrow.

[light fourth candle. Silent reflection.]

You are invited to light a candle of your own, or to kindle within you a flame which represents your burdens, griefs, sorrows, all those things that make Christmas a "blue" time for you. You may speak the name or the event if you wish to do so.

[silent reflection]

We light the Christ candle, remembering that Jesus Christ is always in the center of our lives. He hears our cries, he knows our hearts and, in the midst of all our thoughts and emotions, he offers us hope and healing.

[light the Christ candle.]

Let us pray.

Comforting God, wrap us in your presence in this time of remembrance. With these candles, help us find your light, a light that will guide us day by day, step by step, as we try to live life fully and wholly. We cherish the special ways in which we have been touched by our loved ones. We thank you for the gift their lives have been to us. Now comfort us, encourage us, empower us. AMEN.

Hymn:

Sisters Let us Walk Together
**Sisters let us walk together
sharing sadness loss and grief
we will move through pain to wholeness
brokenness transformed to peace.**

MV 179

**Brothers let us work together
seeking justice, healing shame
filled with hope imbued with courage
ev'ry violence we will name.**

**People let us love together
joining spirits, linking hands
we are God's unique creation
clothed with dignity we'll stand.**

Prayers of the People & Lord's Prayer

SENDING FORTH

Hymn:

Silent Night
**Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.**

VU 67

**Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight:
glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah,
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born.**

**Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
radiant beams from thy holy face,
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.**

Commissioning (Responsive):

We lift up our eyes to the hills. From where will we look for help?

Our help comes from God, who has made heaven and earth.

God will not let our foot stumble, the One who protects Israel will not slumber

The One who protects us will neither slumber nor sleep.

It is God who protects us, our defence at our right hand.

The sun shall not strike us by day, nor the moon by night.

God will protect us from all evil, God will protect our life

God will protect our going and coming, now and forever.

-adapted from Psalm 121

Closing Music