

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

ST. MICHAEL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

December 20, 2020.

4:00 p.m.

Welcome: The Rev. Phillip Wilson, Clergy Associate, St. Michael's Church

Prelude: Bach Suite #2 in d minor (Prelude). David Runnion, Cellist

Leader:

We have come here, the Longest Night, to name the loss and sorrow in our lives when the world around us celebrates joy and happiness.

We have come here, the Longest Night, to acknowledge the darkness as we also claim the light that follows the night.

We have come here, the Longest Night, to remind ourselves that we are not alone and that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God

Cello: *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*

David Runnion, Cellist

Let us pray together:

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

First Reading: Hassidic Story

They tell of Adam; how frightened he must have been when, for the first time, he saw the sun disappear, ending the light of day. It was Adam's first darkness. How could he accept the night, when he had never seen a dawn? After the splendor of the sun, how deep the darkness was for him, how desperate the long terror of the first fall of night... UNTIL Adam learned that day would come again and he could see that there is light and order in the universe. And, then Adam began to see how much light remains in the sky at night: the stars, and their enduring promise of the sun, the returning star of the day. Adam learned that the night is never wholly dark, and that no night is endless.

Silence:

Second Reading: Rainer Maria Rilke

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

Silence

Third Reading: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Silence:

Cello: *In the Bleak Mid-Winter*

David Runnion, Cellist

INVITATION TO CANDLELIGHTING: Candles lit in the name of loss and pain

Cello: Bach Suite #2 in d minor (Minuet II).

David Runnion, Cellist

A LITANY PRAISING GOD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DARKNESS

Leader: For the darkness of waiting, of not knowing what is to come, of staying ready, and quiet, and attentive, we praise you O God:

All: For the darkness and light are both alike to you

Leader: For the darkness of being silent, for the fear of sharing what we are feeling, for our isolation, and pretending that all is well, we praise you, O God.

All: For the darkness and light are both alike to you

Leader: For the darkness of risking to love, to let go of our self-protection and holding back desires, we praise you, O God:

All: For the darkness and light are both alike to you

Leader: For the darkness of daring to hope when we are stuck in hopelessness, for the light of a new day after the dark of night, for those who break through our isolation and remind us that we are loved, we praise you, O God.

All: For the darkness and light are both alike to you

CLOSING PRAYER:

Leader: O God 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, teach us the lessons of endings: children growing... friends leaving... loved ones dying... and when in your time: the grieving over, grudges over, blaming over, excuses over.

All: O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

Leader: In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white, teach us the lessons of new beginnings: of walls that turn into doors, of seeds, planted, which bring to birth what is ready to be born, and in your time, a new song, a deeper relationship, a new purpose, a fuller love.

All: God, grant us the sense of your timing. Amen

BLESSING FOR THE LONGEST NIGHT

Leave this service reassured of the power of a single light to pierce the darkness. Leave with the hope that even during this the Longest Night, that night is never wholly dark, and that no night is endless. Leave with the patience to live with the questions for which there are no easy answers. Leave with the knowledge that we are not alone and that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Amen

Postlude: Bach Suite #2 in d minor (Sarabande) David Runnion, Cellist

Worship Leaders: Phillip Wilson and David Runnion
