

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH AT CALDWELL

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*Our Mission: Shining God's light by ...
Knowing Christ, Growing in His love, Going where He leads.*

Sunday, December 17, 2023

5:00pm

Service of Peace and Hope

Please gather in silent reflection

REFLECTION

"In the godforsaken, obscene quicksand of life, there is a deafening alleluia rising from the souls of those who weep, and of those who weep with those who weep. If you watch, you will see the hand of God putting the stars back in their skies one by one. "Yesterday's Pain". Some of us walk in Advent tethered to our unresolved yesterdays the pain still stabbing, the hurt still throbbing. Its not that we don't know better, its just that we can't stand up anymore by ourselves. On the way of Bethlehem, will you give us a hand?"

- Yesterday's Pain by Ann Weems

PRELUDE

WELCOME & CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

All: On those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone. For the yoke that was weighing upon them, and the burden upon their shoulders, you have broken in pieces, O God, our Redeemer.

OPENING PRAYER

PROCLAIMING AND RESPONDING

OLD TESTAMENT READING Isaiah 40:1-5, 28-31 Page 627, OT

NEW TESTAMENT READING Matthew 11:28-30 Page 11, NT

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies. We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation, when all Creation waits for the Light.

ALL: We remember them with love. May God's love surround them.

HYMN NO. 88 vs. 1

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lowly exile here, until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

A period of silent reflection

We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss: loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy. We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You, asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

ALL: We remember that through You all things are possible. Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.

HYMN NO. 88 vs. 2

*O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily,
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

A period of silent reflection

We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our burdens. We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger and pain. We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming ourselves, and you, for all that we have suffered. We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own mortality.

ALL: We remember that though we have journeyed far and we may have turned away from the light, the light itself has not failed. We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark, with the turning of the wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.

HYMN NO. 88 vs. 6

***O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

A period of silent reflection

In the week ahead we light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

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

HYMN NO. 88 vs. 7

***O come desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind,
Bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace,
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

LIGHTING OF INDIVIDUAL CANDLES

Each of us comes bearing our own hurts, sorrows, broken places. We invite each of you to offer your personal wound to the God who loves each of us deeply and wants to carry our pain. God waits patiently, gently calling out: "Give me your pain, come to me... all who labor and are heavy laden, I will refresh you!"

You are invited to come forward and light a candle. As you light the candle, remember that it is God who lights a candle in our darkness and holds us close until we are able to shine.

READING OF NAMES AND BRIEF PRAYERS FROM ON-LINE SUBMISSIONS

PRAYER AFTER THE CANDLES ARE LIT

These lights in their brightness are only symbols, but as they burn and finally go out, we remember that suffering passes, though memory remains forever.

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.

Intercession for Healing

The God of strength moves within us;

the God of courage hears our distress.

The God of hope reveals wholeness to us;

the God of healing touches us when we are broken.

When the pain overwhelms us, when the burden is too heavy,

we turn to our God, who is sustaining and redeeming.

When there is loneliness, when there is isolation,

we turn to our God, who is loving and present.

For God created us, redeemed us and sustains us,

and we are not alone. Lead us in your ways, O God, and bring us your healing touch.

HYMN NO. 88 vs. 1

***O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

SPECIAL MUSIC

“Abide With Me”

arr. Howard Helvey

BENEDICTION

As we gather this evening, we embrace and claim the darkness that is present both in the world and in our own lives. As people who are familiar with the darkness, we also know that we gather to be illumined by the light of the Christ Child this Christmas season. May the Christ Child, born in a lowly stable, himself an outcast and marginal, bring light, comfort, peace, and joy this holiday season.

HYMN NO. 137

“He Came Down”

HE CAME DOWN

1. He came down that we may have love;
he came down that we may have love;
he came down that we may have love;
hallelujah forevermore.
2. He came down that we may have light;
he came down that we may have light;
he came down that we have light;
hallelujah forevermore.

3. He came down that we may have peace;
he came down that we may have peace;
he came down that we may have peace;
hallelujah forevermore.
4. He came down that we may have joy;
he came down that we may have joy
he came down that we may have joy;
hallelujah forevermore.

May the hope of the Christ Child sustain us through this darkness.

All: That together we may shine again. Amen.

WORSHIP PARTICIPANTS

Rev. William Schram
Valerie Shondel, Director of Music
Scott Westenberger, Worship Leader
Ray Liptak, AV Engineer
Dennis Velez, Assistant AV Engineer

Thank you to the committee who graciously coordinated this Service of Peace and Hope.
Bonnie Chiappetta, Stephen Cornman, Judith D'Annunzio, Christien Endres, Lois Jackson, Nancy
Lopus, Sandra Nathans, and Joyce McGrath.

Christmas Worship Service Schedule

Christmas Eve-December 24th, 2023 @ 10:00AM
Christmas Eve-December 24th, 2023 @ 8:00 PM
Christmas Eve-December 24th, 2023 @ 10:00 PM

Visit www.firstprescaldwell.org to link to our livestream services.