



SHARED BY ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

ADAPTED FROM MOUNTAIN VIEW UNITED CHURCH, 2018

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GATHERING OUR THOUGHTS

O God, we are facing a long dark night. We come burdened with grief, mental health challenges like depression, and loneliness.

We come seeking a place to set them down; a place where our words will be heard, and our feelings honored.

Oh God, we need a safe place where we can drop our masks of good cheer so our tears can flow freely, and our faces can wear the cares of all that we are carrying.

Be among us this night, O God.

Let your compassion heal us in this moment.

Comfort us. Strengthen us. Care for us. Be Christ to us. Amen.

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, and comfort us in our afflictions. Reach into our hearts, heal, and restore us. Where we are hurting, comfort us. And where we are experiencing sorrow, show us compassion. Bless us in the night that we may see your light dawning upon us. Amen.

COMFORT OF THE WORD

Hebrew Scripture: Selected verses from Isaiah 40 (NRSV Translation)

Look up to the heavens! Who made the stars, if not the One who drills them like an army, calling each one by its own name? So mighty is God's power and strength that not one fails to answer. Israel, why then do you complain that our God does not know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice? Our God, the

everlasting God, the creator of the farthest parts of the ends of the earth, never grows tired or weary. No one can fathom the depths of God's understanding. God gives power to the faint and strength to the powerless. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength."

Gospel of Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV Translation)

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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Romans 8:35-39 (New Living Translation)

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ADVENT WREATH LITANY

First Candle

We light the first candle to remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face, and the memory that binds them to us in this season. We hold them up to God with our love, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

Second Candle

We light the second candle to redeem the pain of 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 open hands you will place the gift of peace.

Third Candle

We light the third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time. We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us, years of difficult times. We remember the poignancy of memories, the grief, the sadness, the mental health challenges, and the pain of feeling marginalized or misunderstood.

Fourth Candle

This fourth candle is lit to remember our faith and the gift of hope that God offers to us in the Christmas story. We remember that God considers each of us precious, held in a divine love that can never be extinguished.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Merciful God, we pray that we be comforted in our suffering and made whole. When we feel afraid, give us courage; when we feel afflicted, afford us patience; when we are lost, offer us hope; when we are alone, move us to stand beside one another. And together, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us to pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.