

**Order of Service
December 5, 2021**

Prelude "Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel" (Sue)

Opening Words/Welcome/Announcements (Carolyn)

Chalice Lighting (Carolyn)

Candle of Peace & Justice (Carolyn)

Hymn #55 "Dark of Winter"

Dark of winter, soft and still, your quiet calm surrounds me
Let my thoughts go where they will; ease my mind profoundly
And then my soul will sing a song, a blessed song of love eternal
Gentle darkness, soft and still, bring your quiet to me
Darkness, soothe my weary eyes, that i may see more clearly
When my heart with sorrow cries, comfort and caress me
And then my soul may hear a voice, a still small voice of love eternal
Darkness when my fears arise, let your peace flow through me

A Shared Moment for All Ages (Rev. Matthew)

- Anthada drishti
- Honing our senses of what happens inside our bodies - in our minds

Offering (Carolyn)

Music "Darkness Visible" - Rev. Mary Grigolia

In the light of the darkness visible we are reborn

Joys and Concerns (Carolyn)

Hymn #123 "Spirit of Life"

Spirit of life come unto me sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion
Rise in the wind, blow in the sea, move in the hand giving life the shape of justice
Roots hold me close, wings set me free
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me

Reading "You Darkness" by Ranier Maria Rilke (Rev. Matthew)

- Read Lectio Divina Style
- Notice what shimmers, what associations
- Another kind of listening

René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria **Rilke** (4 December 1875 – 29 December 1926), better known as Rainer Maria **Rilke** was an Austrian poet and novelist.

You, darkness, that I come from
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes a circle of light for everyone
and then no one outside learns of you.
But the darkness pulls in everything-
shapes and fires, animals and myself,
how easily it gathers them! -
powers and people-
and it is possible a great presence is moving near me.
I have faith in nights.

Rainer Maria Rilke (pub 1905)
Robert Bly (transl)

Message “Dear Darkness” by Rev. Matthew Cockrum

Dear Darkness,

I have decided to address you directly today, as does the poet, Rilke, in his poem earlier. You know of course that often at this time of year, as folks are anticipating Christmas, sermons contain letters to figures in the nativity scene - from Mary and Joseph to the animals and wise men to the angels, wise ones, and even to the baby Jesus.

But as Rilke asserts, those illumined by and included in the glow of the scene often distract us from the bigger picture...even beyond the sociopolitical contexts of empires and oppressions...

“The fire makes a circle of light...and then no one outside learns of you...”

And I want to learn of you
I want to learn from you

I am also aware, darkness that I come from
That we all come from

That asking to learn of you and from you is no small feat
And it is not as romantic as I might want it to be

Of course there is the acknowledgement that you've gotten a bad rap
We've learned about how colorism and racism have been reinscribed and reinforced over the years
Come to appreciate and police ourselves for using words like "blacklisted"

Words that associate darkness with something bad
Something to be avoided

And yet on the other side of the coin
I am aware that even the adoration of darkness can become a caricature

Thinking here of the goddess figure Kali
A fierce feminine figure

Who devours demons
Saves by destroying

And then is called back to calmness by the crying of an infant

I want to learn of you
And from you
Because I believe that I (and not I alone)
Am too ready to either

Adore you falsely
Or to run from you fearfully
I want to learn how you work in the grand scheme of things

I write to you especially now
When others are writing wishes to Santa Claus
Or composing annual recounts to loved ones in their end of the year letters

Because these days are, indeed, the darkest of the year
As we here in the northern hemisphere
Are tilted further and further away from the sun

As our nights come earlier
Last longer

But our lives
Of work
Of school
Of habit and commitment

Refuse to change
And we are just passing through
The renewal of the moon
Those of us who watch it and notice
Will be hard pressed to find any glimpse of the fair night luminary
And not only because of the cloudy, west michigan skies

I want to know, Dear Darkness
What is it like
To stand aside
And watch as we, some of us, many of us
Kindle candles
Decorate brightly
Feast and gather
Exchange gifts
And remind one another
 That the light *will* come back

What is it like
 To be prayed against
 To be resisted
 To be endured
 Rather than to be
 Celebrated
 Settled into
 Cherished
 Acknowledged
 Even embraced...and allowed to embrace

I think perhaps I know...at least a bit
I think maybe all of us do

We all have some experience
 Of being resisted
 Of being endured
 Of being prayed against

There is something within each of us
 That longs
 To be celebrated
 To be settled into
 Cherished
 Embraced...and allowed to embrace

There is something
 In each of us, i think i hear you saying
That yearns to be able to trust the intuition
 That a great presence is moving near us
A presence that somehow - unintelligibly
 Includes and embraces everything and everyone

But how
Just how
Do we lean into that?
How can I, how can we
 Better learn to pay attention
Not only to the wisdom and power of our intellect
 Not only to our keen insights
 Not only to our well-honed opinions and positions
And not only
 To the sources we trust
 The institutions and pronouncements
 That either reinforce our already held opinions
 Or that challenge us only in ways we will accept

Dear Darkness
How...can I, can we
 Pay better
 Closer
 Kinder
Attention to you?

I am reminded of a passage in a Marge Piercy poem, "Councils"
Where she says:

*Perhaps we should sit in the dark.
In the dark we could utter our feelings.
In the dark we could propose
and describe and suggest.*

*In the dark we could not see who speaks
and only the words
would say what they say.*

*Thus saying what we feel and what we want,
what we fear for ourselves and each other
into the dark, perhaps we could begin
to begin to listen...*

*...After each speaks, [they]
will repeat a ritual phrase:*

*It is not I who speaks but the wind.
Wind blows through me.*

Long after me, is the wind

I wonder, Darkness, what it would be like
If we held our feasts and festivals
In the darkness
 Without lighting candles
 Or turning on colorful bulbs
Would the tales we tell ourselves and each other
Feel more like spooky ghost stories?

If we allowed ourselves to be swallowed by you
 Would we come to know ourselves
 And the human experience
 More clearly
 More deeply
Would we come to accept ourselves
 And each other
Would we come to accept our bodies?

Of course, there is a part of me that has been faithfully trained to be skeptical
Because if I cannot see who is speaking
What if the wrong kind of person's opinion gets too much air time?

And also
Of course
What if i were to discover
That the people I trust
 Actually hold things within themselves
Opinions
Experiences
Actions
That are unspeakable to me
 Abhorrent
 Deemed unworthy of love
 irredeemable

But if I believe, as I say I do
That there is nothing within us unworthy of love
 A conviction inspired by our universalist forebears and spirit
And if i believe, as i say i do
That panentheism is real
 That everything and everyone is in G-d
 But that G-d is bigger than just the sum of everything there is

Then this cannot be true, can it?

And if I believe, as I say I do
That scripture has important
Powerful
poetic
Truth

Then "in the beginning"...was Darkness

You, Darkness, that we come from
Are the mystery at the beginning
And well I know
From my work as a hospice chaplain
You are the mystery to which we return
Some of peacefully
Others of us, not so much

But you are also
The mystery in which we live
And move
And have our being

This, too, i am learning more deeply from my work as a hospice chaplain
Where so very many of the folks i visit
Live with dementia
Or other conditions that limit my capacity
To enter and understand their worlds
As easily as I do (or think I do...or hope to)
With so many others

And this
Long before they begin slipping more visibly
Toward those places on the edges
The fabrics of life and death
Of this world
And whatever comes next
Fray
And intertwine
Overlap

And those, too,
Dear Darkness
Are such precious places, I am finding

Places so many of us
 Myself included
Can be afraid to go

Is it because we want to trust and believe only
 What is rational and reasonable?
And what are we missing
 But putting all of our energy and attention there?
How are we casting others aside
 (into outer darkness as some would say)
By refusing to even begin to begin to listen
 To experiences of
 (and opinions about)
Reality
 That are so counter to our own?

Perhaps I first began to learn this lesson
 When I was in training as a chaplain
And called to visit folks hospitalized in the psychiatric unit

It was there
 Not at deathbeds
Where my fear of the darkness of the unknown
 Became so clear to me
Because
 Ahh...you know why, don't you, Dear Darkness?
Because the lines between
 "Us" and "them"
 "Sanity" and "insanity"
 "Inspiration" and "mania"
Is oh-so visibly thin and permeable
 When someone offering religious and spiritual comfort
Is called to visit someone
 Convinced that they are God

I can imagine you chuckling at that, Dear Darkness
 Or at least I hope you are
And I imagine you are not surprised
And I imagine you do not judge me for this and for these
 My insecurities
 My doubts
 My fears

And I hope
Oh how I hope
I hope, Dear Darkness
 That I and that we can learn from you
 In these days where you claim more and more of our time

I hope that I and we can trust how you draw everything to yourself

So that as we continue to try to figure it all out
 Politics
 Public Safety
 Holiday Gatherings
 Our own lives

As we continue to try to navigate the sacred and the mundane

Help us to look
 To listen
 To feel
For how you are enfolding us
Help us, will you?
 to be less afraid of you
 Inside us
 Inside others
 And all around us

Help us
 To trust and to lean into
 Our direct experience of you
 Transcending mystery and wonder
That renews us
 Restores our senses
 That life is, indeed, worth living
 That death is not the enemy
 That darkness...is where we are born and reborn again

Give to us
 Dear Darkness
 The wisdom to return again
 The capacity to honor the fullness of life
 In all its complexities

I ask these gifts for all of us, of course
 But, selfishly, for myself
 I need you, Dear Darkness

Dear Darkness that I come from

I need you
And the night vision that you bring

Peace, Faith & Passion,
Matthew

Hymn #1011 “Return Again”

Return again, return again, return to the home of your soul
Return to who you are, return to what you are, return to where you are born and reborn again

Closing Words (Matthew)

May all the blessings of these darkening days be with you
May you honor the holiness within you
 And all around you
May you find comfort and courage
 For your fear and doubt
May you know that you are never, truly
 Separated
 Or cast out
And may your life be a message of this same blessing and a promise
Everywhere you go.

Postlude “Night Vision” (Sue)

By day give thanks, by night beware
Half the world in sweetness, the other in fear
When the darkness takes you with her hand across your face
Don't give in too quickly find the things she's erased
Find the line, find the shape through the grain
Find the outline and things will tell you their name
The table, the guitar, the empty glass
All will blend together when the daylight has passed
Find the line, find the shape, through the grain
Find the outline and things will tell you their name
Now i watch you falling into sleep
Watch your firsts against the sheet
Watch your lips fall open and your eyes dim in blind faith
I would shelter you and keep you in light
But i can only give you night vision

Extinguish Chalice (Carolyn)

- Dark of memory
- Dark of hope/vision
- Unknown
- Night vision - joseph and jacob dreams, interpreting what is difficult to see, understand
- Parsha
 - Jacob: dreams, angels, reunions with Esau & Joseph container of oil
 - Judah & Tamar
 - Joseph: dreams, two pits (sold by brothers, jail in Egypt), reunions with brothers and father
- Haftarah
 - Solomon: dreams, two women and Babies
- Marge Piercy - Councils - in the dark we could simply hear
- UU
 - Cherishing clarity, insight, knowing...being right
 - 8th principle project
- World around us
 - Politics
 - Health
- Hanukkah
- New moon
- Rebirth
 - Jewish scripture - in the beginning was darkness
 - Dark of winter
 - Return again
 - In the light of the darkness visible we are reborn
 - Advent - jesus birth, widening the tent pegs
- Doorways to dying - being with vs being right or righteous
- Hello Darkness my old friend
- Kali
- Facing shadows - strength

Or

Anita Barrows & Joanna Macy translation in hymnal supplement

You, darkness, of whom I am born -
I love you more than the flame
That limits the world
To the circle it illumines

And excludes all the rest.
But the darkness embraces everything:
Shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
People and nations - just as they are.
It lets me imagine
A great presence stirring beside me
I believe in the night.

Night. Oh you face against my face
Dissolved in deepness.
You, my awestruck gaze's vast
Preponderance

Night, in my eyesight shuddering,
But in yourself so firm;
Inexhaustible creation, continuing on
Over the earth's remains;

Full of young starfields that hurl
Fire from the black at their edges
Into the soundless adventure
Of the space-between;

By your very being, transcender,
You make me seem small - ;
Yet, at one with the dark earth,
I dare exist in you

(Muzot, October 2-3, 1924 - Edward Snow translation)

Hymn - Dark of Winter
Chalice extinguishing - Matthew
Closing words - Carolyn
Postlude