

Blue Christmas

Mandy Barkhaus, Jake Parsley, Ashlee Alley Crawford

Horizons. I am Pastor Barkhaus. I'm the lead pastor here at horizons. This is Jake Parsley. He is, part of our steering team, part of our leadership team here at horizons. And this is Pastor Ashley Alley Crawford. And she is, part of Horizons, but also works with our conference staff. And we are we are here with you tonight in this space, because we care about you in this, in this time that we have, together.

Now, sometimes this service is called the longest night service. You'll hear that mentioned sometimes. And the longest night doesn't actually happen until December 21st. So two more days until we get to the longest night. And it feels like when that comes, the darkness just overcomes the daylight. But the longest night actually means that the days begin to grow lighter and you can't notice it at first.

It's very gradual process, but the light is coming and the days will get brighter and longer. So there probably are a host of reasons why you're here tonight. Maybe you've had a life changing event that's happened this year and maybe it occurred last year or even years ago. Maybe it's not any one thing, but a lot of little things that have piled up and you just don't even, maybe don't even know why you don't have joy or you're struggling.

In this season, this season can be incredibly difficult for so many people,

struggle to find joy amongst sadness, grief, disappointment or anger. Whatever life situation is weighing on you, whether it be loss, despair or uncertainty, know that all of it is welcome here. In the midst of these bright lights and the Christmas carols and the celebrations, some of us feel like we're stumbling in the dark, longing for even a glimpse of light.

And tonight we we don't gather to deny our grief. We're not, completely healing our pain in this space. Whether, again, it's the loss of a loved one, a loss of a relationship, a loss of a dream, or maybe the loss of a health. And instead we acknowledge the darkness, we press into it and we look forward the light.

Will you join us in prayer?

God, it is good to be here in this place of respite from the busy season that's going on around us. We come tonight wanting to connect with you, with your people, and even with what we are thinking and feeling at this time. The season is a mix of merry and bright, deep longing for connection with you and in memories, even both good and bad, of seasons gone by and heaviness and dread of what is or what could be God.

We offer all of these things to you tonight. Will you meet with us here in this time of worship? Can we offer ourselves just as we are feeling less merry and more weary? We hope so. Thank you that you can that we can be here tonight. Give us an awareness of your presence and may our presence here give honor to you.

We pray this in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the midst of our struggles, we might ask, does anybody see us? Does anyone hear us? Are we all alone? Who will come to rescue us?

Hear this scripture passage from Psalm 22, verses one through five. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? From the words of my groaning, oh my God, I cry by day.

But you do not answer. And by night, but find no rest yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel in our in you. Our ancestors trusted, they trusted, and you delivered them to you. They cried and were saved in you. They trusted and were not put to shame.

This Psalm holds so much power because it helps us realize that others have suffered throughout time.

You can feel the pain of King David in these verses, and Jesus too cried out these very words, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You're not alone. Jesus runs after the broken hearted, and he has time to sit with you and your pain.

Maintenance. Over. Under the weight of the curse you've been drinking.

You know what happened. And more than the shame, you recklessly give.

Silently scream through the tears you can't keep from falling.

Wishing they poured out enough to break through the heavy.

Jesus rose after the broken ones. Weeping with those who wait. He crowns them with your. His love shape shatter in Jesus name.

You can't shake the feeling. He's not in a rush. He has time for your day.

To lean on his shoulder. It's never too late in your story. Night over.

You wish you could go back in time. Rewrite your own ending.

When you find faith, you believe it's just the beginning. G Jesus runs after the broken ones. Weeping with those who. He crowns them with your body. And Jesus runs after the broken ones. We break with those who wait. Counting with your.

Up. Shame. Shattering Jesus name.

He is he and he has done to take. What's wrong and making us. He is he me? Yes, I to take us long. Making love. He is here and he has died to take. What's wrong and make it right and sees us wrong. It's after the broken ones. We be with those who wait. He crowns them with your loving.

And Jesus runs after the broken ones, weeping with those who we, who crowns them with your love in his love shape shattering she it's us. Name.

Well, in a season of merry and bright. We also find the longest night. I wrote that in an email a couple weeks ago, and it's kind of become an accidental mantra for me. It certainly just rolls off the tongue kind of rhymes there. But I've also known all season long that I was going to be helping to

lead this service here tonight, and I honestly just have been feeling the tensions of the season myself.

My Christmas tree is sparkling and beautiful. It's gorgeous. I'll show you a picture of it if you want to see it. And the sun is going down earlier and earlier and darkness is falling on the day, long before I'm ready for it to be done. What about you? Are you feeling the tensions of the season?

Well, I know that my dog does,

The time change happened in November, and our golden retriever was very confused. You see, we typically kind of leave the front door open so she can perform her neighborhood watch duties of our front porch area. And, so she would bark, saying, hey, open the door. I'm not off duty quite yet. And it was shortly after the time change and I said, okay, well, I'll open the door.

And she looked at me like, what is going on? Why does it look like it's midnight? It was 5:30. So I know that these tensions, are kind of internal here to all of us. The days are becoming shorter and the darkness threatens to overwhelm the warm. And the carefree days feel like they were forever ago. So the tensions of these two things, merry and bright and the longest night.

It's a strong force. We have happy, decor and Christmas parties and red and green and peppermint and hot chocolate. But we also potentially have some painful memories or harsh realities. Maybe a sense of blues, or lack of desire to participate in all the things that we're supposed to be doing right now that can possibly be a part of the looming heaviness that brings us here tonight.

Our service tonight, includes songs to kind of help us give voice to some of the dynamics of this season. Music can comfort, it can express and articulate. It can even accompany us in the best and the worst of times. And one of the most, typical aspects of this season is music. You hear it everywhere you go.

Well, a couple of years ago, the familiar Christmas carol O Holy Night impacted me in a new way. So check out these words O Holy Night. The stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth. Yes. The typical nativity scene stuff right here. A star in the sky, imagining this scene over a sleepy little town with a vibrant heavenly shimmer.

And then long lay the world in sin and error pining. Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. These points to the need for that Savior. Sin and error, a deep longing for all to be right in the world, and the awareness that something transformative happened at the appearance of Jesus. That the soul felt its worth. Sit with that idea for just a moment.

The appearance of Jesus reveals to us that we are a person with a soul. We've experienced the pains and maybe even the evils of this world, sin and error, and we are longing for that restoration. In my favorite definition of a soul is this. It's from, He was actually a seminary professor of mine named Robert Mulholland, and he says this.

He says the soul is where God is present to us. Think about that and then consider your own soul for just a moment. Where is God present to you?

Is it in your pain, in your joy, in the laughter of a child, in your tears? The soul is more than our intellect in our heart. In fact, I think sometimes to our deficit we can navigate both our intellect and

our heart, not even thinking about our soul. But if our soul is the place where God is present to us, then any aspect of our lives can encounter the healing, the restoration, the transformative presence of God.

Hopefully, that includes our intellect in our heart. Our thoughts are our emotions, our feelings. But sometimes we can just get so busy doing stuff and taking care of whatever is in front of us that we neglect our very souls. We neglect the place where God is present to us. Or as this hymn writer said, our souls can forget their worth fatigue, physical emotional fatigue, or feeling stuck in some area of our lives disease, pain, financial strain, all of these things and more can cripple us, can make us sort of turn into dutiful robots.

Just doing the next thing and putting out the next fire and quieting the next cry. And sure, most of our lives aren't like that all the time, but they're definitely our periods where the struggle outweighs the joy. And I'm guessing you wouldn't be here tonight if you didn't feel like that at least some of the time. So long lay the world in sin and error pining.

Things are not the way they should be. Till he, Jesus the Savior, appeared in the soul. Felt it's worth the soul does have worth. Your pain is legitimate, your emotions are valid and your need for a savior bubbles up. And good news this is not the end of the story. The next words plant some seeds for the darkness to turn into light.

A thrill of hope. The weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn, a thrill of hope. When hope breaks into an otherwise dreary circumstance, everything changes. Darkness can threaten to overwhelm. And then on the horizon a new and glorious morning. Indeed, weariness rejoices. So how do we cultivate hope? Well, Mandy preached a great sermon on this a couple weeks ago, the first week of advent.

But I would say that one way that we can cultivate hope is actually to simply tell the truth. Life is hard. Things aren't as I wish they were. And yet Jesus is here with me. That third part, Jesus being here with us, is the thing that begins to redeem our pain and giving us a sense of purpose where hope can be born.

Or in the words of this hymn, long lay the world in sin and error pining, till Jesus appeared and the soul felt its worth because of Jesus in a specially because we can know his presence here with us, right here, right now. We can have hope. And I'm actually convinced that Jesus does his best work in suffering. Well, I want to draw attention to one more set of words in the final verse.

Truly, he taught us to love one another. His law is love and his gospel is peace. Chains shall break, for the slave is our brother, and in his name all oppression shall cease. Well, it's these words that actually got the hymn writer in some trouble. It was written in France in the mid 1800s, and it was banned, shortly after that.

And then it was, it was translated into English and then banned here in the U.S. during the Civil War. And yet, somehow, this little Christmas carol has emerged as a powerful witness of the supremacy of Jesus Christ the Savior, the light in the darkness whose appearance lets our souls feel their worth in the season of merry and bright.

We also do have the longest night. And thanks be to God that we can hope for Dawn to break. Well, we have a chance to sing that song here together tonight. Will you join as we sing O Holy Night?

O holy night. The stars are brightly shining. It is a night of our dear Savior's birth.

Long lay the world in sin and error. Poor till he appeared in the soul. Felt its worth.

The thrill of home. The weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees. Who hear the angel voices on us. Divine O night day when Christ was born. Oh none divine O o night, O night g5.

Truly taught us to love one another. Lover. His love is. And his gospel is peace.

And change shall he pray. For the slave is a brother and in his name all oppression shall cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus ways. We let all within us praise his holy name. Christ is the Lord, who praise his name forever. His love and glory are.

The more proclaimed his for us. Pick up glory evermore. Proclaim.

Christ is the love. Oh, praise his name forever his love. Oh me.

Therefore proclaim. His other name ul. Here. Learn more. Proclaim his love in glory year for more. Proclaim.

To remember those persons whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their voice, their face. The memory that binds them to us. In this season. We hold them before God, giving thanks for their lives in ours.

Take a moment to remember those who have died, and I invite you to name them in the silence of your hearts or out loud.

Lord, we bring our loved one to you. Trusting in your love and care. Accept our gratitude as we entrust them to your arms. Longing for their peace with you and for a place by their side. One day. Strengthen us in moments of weariness. Help us to find joy in the beauty and love around us. Thank you for the gift they've been in our lives.

May the hope of reunion in your presence sustain us. Comfort our aching hearts. Fill our emptiness with your peace. And draws near to us in our sorrow. Amen.

The second candle represents the pain of loss of relationships, jobs, health, peace, and the familiar world that we once knew. We gather our pain and offer it to you. Oh, God, asking for your gift of peace in its place.

Take a moment to reflect on your losses. Name them aloud or silently in your heart if you are comfortable. Place your hands on your lap with your palms facing up.

God of mystery. We seek your peace. Remind us of your promises and presence. When we feel anxious or afraid or tired. Help us trust in you. To embrace life's changes and to be patient with transformation. Amen.

Well, the third candle is for those who feel a loss of direction, who struggle to find purpose or vision or difficulty with work either paid or unpaid.

God of the Exodus. Who led your people through the wilderness? Hear our prayer. We long for clarity. To know where we are and where to go. But the questions remain. You call us to trust in your guidance and promise. Do not fear. I go before you when our understanding fails or we feel confusion. Will you be our guide?

Grant us a sense of direction and the peace of knowing that we are on your path. Take what is lost within us and lead us home to you. Amen.

The fourth candle

symbolizes hope. The hope of the Christmas story. We remember that God who shares our lives promises a future free from pain and suffering.

One candle remains unlit. To be lit on Christmas Eve. And as a reminder that more light is coming. And as we move into a time of communion, sharing the sacrament of this holy meal together. If you would like to light one of these blue votive candles on either side of the stage, you are invited to do so as you come forward for communion.

You can light a candle in remembrance of someone that you lost. You can light a candle as a prayer of hope or for whatever it is that you are longing for. This Christmas season, but before we move into this time of Holy Communion, let's pray. God of gratitude. Lift our hearts to trust in your care. When the way is unclear.

Remind us that shadows exist. Because your light shines behind our fears. Teach us to see love, trust in it and grow in its power so our lives may bring comfort to others. We pray in the name of Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.

Christ invites all who are weary and burdened to come to his table of grace. In this time of communion, we bring our brokenness, our grief, and our longing for peace. Come just as you are to the table of hope and healing.

It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you. Almighty God, creator of Heaven and earth. In this season we remember your promise of Emmanuel, God with us, a light that no darkness can overcome in our pain and sorrow. You are present, offering hope and peace. Well, holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ.

He came to bring light into our darkness to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim release to the captives. Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, he broke the power of sin and death and made a way for us to be whole. On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread. He gave thanks to you, and he broke the bread, giving it to his disciples, and said, take, eat this is my body broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And when the supper was over, he took the cup. He gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said, drink from this, all of you. This is the blood, my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on these gifts on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and the blood of Christ, that we may be for the world, the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood, by your spirit. Comfort those who grieve. Strengthen the weary and light the path for all who seek you.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray the prayer that 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.

So the communion table is open to everyone. This is the Lord's table, and it is a sacrament that we share together. And everyone is welcome to this table. We, receive communion here by intention, which means that you will be handed a piece of bread, and then you will dip it into the cup of juice. If you are not comfortable with that, we do have little single serving things of juice that you may use.

We also have allergen friendly bread at these two tables here at the front. And then if you would like to remain in your seat and have communion brought to you for whatever reason, please just let one of the hosts know and they will make sure that you receive communion at your seat. Come all who are weary. Come all who are broken.

Come to the table.

The world waits for a miracle. The heart longs for a little bit of hope will come. Oh, come. Amen. You.

The child prays for peace on earth. And she's calling out from the sea of her. Oh, come. Oh, God. Amen. You.

And can you hear the angels sing in blood? Oh, they to the light of the world. Glory. The light of the world is here.

The drought breaks with the tears of mother babies. Cry is the sound of love. Come down, come down. You may.

Be. Here's the song for the suffering. He is Messiah. The Prince of Peace says. Come, he has come. He made you up to glory, to the light of the world. Oh, to the light of the world. Glory to the light of the world. Oh, to the light of the world. For a one way for all who under for all who prayed for all who wonder.

Behold your king. Behold beside your love he made you well. You mean you have.

Your love for me to the light of the world. Oh, worry to the light of the world. Oh, ring to the light of the world. Behold your king. Behold beside us. He made you us. He made you way.

Oh, wait for me. We become the heart longs for. Little bit of for. Oh, come, oh come. Amen. You have.

Thank you for joining us this evening. If I, if I didn't have to be up here on this stage, I would be sitting there with you this season of life for me is difficult. So thank you for allowing me to be a part of this and for you being here, too. So thank you for for being here.

There. On the way out, maybe you saw the table on the way in, but on the way out, there is a table that has some, little crocheted blue hearts, some blankets, some some kids things, too. If you know a child who is, having a difficult time. So take whatever you might need or, you know, somebody might need on that table on your way out.

Also, me, Pastor Ashley, we we would love to stay with you and pray if you need that at the end of the service. So thank you again for for being here tonight.

Well, friends, hear these words from Isaiah chapter nine verse two. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shone. May the light of God shine on and in you, even in the darkest night. Amen.