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**A Blue Christmas Service:**

***If You're Hurting at Christmas***

The Piazza, Eastwood Uniting Church

(14-16 Lakeside Road, Eastwood)

Wednesday, 13 December 2023, 7PM

**Welcome**

The minister says the word of welcome to gathered congregation.

Tonight, we welcome you to our Blue Christmas service, a service that has been put together especially for those of us who are not feeling particularly merry and bright right now.

This is somewhere to come if, despite all the decorations, the cards, the music playing in the shops, the concerts and parties and the advertisers who want you to believe that you can buy wonderful, you don’t really feel very much like celebrating. The idea that *a merry little Christmas* is all you need for your troubles to be miles away has a decidedly hollow ring to it.

We hope that you’ll find this a safe place to be transparent with yourself and with God, a safe place to admit that maybe you’re not ok at the moment, that maybe what you’re really feeling is sad, discouraged, or even angry. A place for you to be real with your struggles and your questions.

Those of us feeling a little blue at this time of year can feel edged out and forgotten as everyone else seems caught up in the mad frenzy of their own preparations and celebrations. We hope that as you look around you tonight, and as you think about the Christmas message, you’ll find comfort and hope in knowing that you are not alone.

Tonight, there will be a variety of music to listen to but we won’t sing. We will light some candles and spend time in prayer and silent reflection. After the service, please stay for a while to pray or leave quietly if you can, and if it would help to have someone to talk to or pray with, but you don’t know who you could ask, please let me know.

Will you join *us* as we commit this time together to God?

**Prayer**

*Let us pray:*

God of mercy and love,

we gather here today as hurting people,

bringing our pain, our sorrow

and our confusion to this safe space tonight.

Would you meet us in our darkness,

and give us freedom to struggle together

as we seek your presence.

We ask for strength for today,

courage for tomorrow

and peace for the past.

Amen.

**Light the central candle**

The minister invites an attendee to light the central candle.

**Reading: John 1:1-5 (New Revised Standard Version)**

The minister reads the passage on behalf of the congregation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**The empty chair**

This empty chair represents those who won’t be home for Christmas.

Perhaps a relationship has ended, perhaps the people we love will be far away, perhaps sickness or death has changed how things used to be…

**Light the first outer candle**

We light this first candle to remember those we have loved and lost.

We pause to remember their names, their faces, their voices and the memories of them that we hold in our hearts.

The minister lights the first candle.

[Pause]

We thank God for them and ask for his comfort, and when we are feeling overcome with sadness, we ask for the peace that is greater than we can ever understand.

**ALL:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Light the second candle**

The empty chair also represents the pain and sadness that can come from other events that enter our lives, uninvited and unwanted – leaving us reeling in pain and shock, unable to shake the feeling that it wasn’t supposed to be like that.

So we light this candle to represent other losses that we find ourselves faced with.

The loss of health,  
of independence,  
of freedom,  
the loss of confidence or security,  
plans that did not work out,  
or hopes that ended in despair.

We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to bind up those who are broken-hearted, about some of the losses that you are feeling at this time.

The minister lights the second candle.

[Pause]

**ALL:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Light the third candle**

This candle represents our courage: the courage to face our sadness, to share our feelings with others, our doubts and fears, our anger, frustration or depression, and to dare to hope in the depths of our pain.

We pause now for you to tell the God who longs to take you by the hand and says to you, do not fear, I will help you, about some areas where you need help in finding courage.

The minister lights the third candle.

[Pause]

**ALL:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Light the fourth candle**

We light this fourth candle to remember those who have supported us in our pain.

We pause to remember the prayers, the words of comfort and support, the acts of kindness from family and friends and those who stood with us in our time of need.

The minister lights the fourth candle.

[Pause]

We thank you God for sending others to remind us that we are never alone.

And we thank you for sending your son, Jesus.

**ALL:** Amen.

**Focus on the central candle**

Standing here in the centre of the candles that represent some of life’s joy and pain, this central candle represents Jesus who has come to be Immanuel, God with us, in the midst of it all.

Jesus who was born as a helpless baby – and who hears our cries, and understands how weak and helpless we can feel.

Jesus the good shepherd, who knows our hearts and offers us healing and hope in the midst of our suffering. Who came to help us understand just how much God loves us. And who lived and died to restore our relationship with our heavenly father.

Jesus who will reign as King over God’s new creation, where there will be no more sickness or death or crying or pain for all eternity. And who has given us his Holy Spirit to help, comfort and guide us as we seek to follow him here on earth and wait for his glorious return.

We’re going to play some music now – an old carol which expresses the longing the Israelites felt as they waited for God to send the deliverer the One had promised. Whilst the music is playing can I invite you just to sit and rest in God’s presence.

**Prayer**

*Let us pray:*

O God,

be with us in our darkness.

Make your face shine upon us

and give us peace.

We pray for your Holy Spirit

to be at work within us, all of us

who are gathered here tonight,

may your Holy Spirit comfort us,

may it sustain us,

may it remind us

of your constant love for us.

We trust this time of listening to you

and ask you to open our hearts and our minds

to whatever it is

that we need to hear from you tonight.

**Amen.**

**Time to Remember**

The minister invites the congregation to remember those who were part of the congregation, family and friends, and all memories that we have interwoven with them in the past and the present, especially those who passed on this year.

**Music and the lighting of individual candles**

The minister invites people to come up and light a tea candle, making sure that physical distancing is kept in order to make the space safe.

In a moment we are going to play a song which expresses this resolve to reach out and take hold of God’s promise to be there with us in the midst of life’s storms.

Whilst the music is playing, you’re invited, if you’d like to do so, to come up and take a tea candle to represent whatever pain and loss you’re experiencing most strongly tonight. You may light it from the candle in the centre that represents Jesus, as a way of saying thank you to him for being the light in our darkness. And then plant the candle down in the sand in this tray, as you ask for God’s help to keep on trusting him in the middle of whatever’s going on around you. It’s okay, if you want to hold the candle in your hands.

**Closing**

In a moment we’ll say the Psalm 23 together and finish with a prayer. Then we’ll play one final piece of music and after that it will be quiet in here. Please feel free to stay longer if you’d like to.

If you feel it would help to talk to someone or would like someone to pray with you and you don’t know who you could ask, please come and talk to Seung Jae Yeon, or members of Eastwood Uniting who are with us tonight.

Psalm 23 has brought comfort to so many people over the years, let’s say it together now – if you know a different version to the one on the program, just say the one that means the most to you.

***Psalm 23***

*The Lord is my shepherd;*

*I have all that I need.*

*He lets me rest in green meadows;*

*he leads me beside peaceful streams.*

*He renews my strength.*

*He guides me along right paths,*

*bringing honour to his name.*

*Even when I walk through the darkest valley*

*I will not be afraid for you are close beside me.*

*You rod and your staff protect and comfort me.*

*You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.*

*You honour me by anointing my head with oil.*

*My cup overflows with blessings.*

*Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me*

*all the days of my life*

*and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.*

**Prayer**

Comforting God, as we leave this place would you continue to wrap us in your presence. Be with us in our struggles, and when we get lost in the darkness, shine your light and help us find our way back to you.

Amen.

After the service, please stay for a while to pray or leave quietly if you can, and if it would help to have someone to talk to or pray with, but you don’t know who you could ask, please let the minister know.

**Eastwood Uniting Church**

**Christmas Season Worship Services**

Christmas Eve: Sunday 24 December 9:30am

Christmas Day: Monday 25 December 9:30am

Christmas 1: Sunday 31 December 9:30am

**Sunday Worship Service:**

8am English Service

(Break in January 2024, then resume in February 2024)

9:30am Multi Language Service (English and Chinese)

11:00am Korean Language Service

**Ministry Team (Pastoral Support):**

Lead Minister: Rev’d Seung Jae Yeon 0413 837 721

Community Minister: Rev’d Tennyson Chan 0411 896 274 (廣東話, 普通話)

Convenor of Pastoral Friends: Rev’d Marion Gledhill 0423 355 759

Korean minister: 황기덕 목사 0422 836 933