



**Birchcliff Bluffs United Church**

**Ministers:** All the People – wherever and however they gather

**Minister of Word & Sacrament:** Rev. Dr. Ellen Redcliffe

**Music Director:** Randy Vancourt

**December 21, 2023**

**Blue Christmas Service**

**WE GATHER AS GOD’S PEOPLE**

**Prelude**

**Where Two or Three are Gathered**

**MV 14**

**Lighting the Christ Candle**

Advent has arrived. We enter into the dance of darkness and light. They merge, they blend, they separate – drawing us into the dance, shining their light into our darkness.

*The candle is lit.*

Welcome to this safe place.

**Land Acknowledgement**

We now take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which we gather. It has been a site of human activity for many thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca and the Mississaugas of the Credit and Scugog. The lands where Birchcliff Bluffs United Church sits are part of the Williams Treaty. Today the meeting place around Toronto is still home to many indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory and we seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

**Gathering Prayer**

Creator of the Universe, you hold us in your heart. We gather this day to name our sadness, our hope for healing, and our yearning to be together in your love.

**Give us your light so that the shadows of grief will be less overwhelming and your love more discernible, today and every day. Amen.**

**Hymn**

**In the Bleak Midwinter**

**VU 55**

1 In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;

snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.

2 Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;  
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;  
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed  
the Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ.

4 What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
if I were a wise one, I would do my part;  
yet what I can I give him - give my heart.

**Scripture      Lamentations 1:1-7**

**1** How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!  
How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!  
She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.

**<sup>2</sup> Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks.  
Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her.**

**All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.**

**<sup>3</sup>** After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile.  
She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place.  
All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.

**<sup>4</sup> The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed festivals.**

**All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her young women grieve, and she is  
in bitter anguish.**

**<sup>5</sup>** Her foes have become her masters; her enemies are at ease.  
The LORD has brought her grief because of her many sins.  
Her children have gone into exile, captive before the foe.

**<sup>6</sup> All the splendor has departed from Daughter Zion.  
Her princes are like deer that find no pasture;  
in weakness they have fled before the pursuer.**

**<sup>7</sup>** In the days of her affliction and wandering Jerusalem remembers all the treasures that were hers  
in days of old. When her people fell into enemy hands, there was no one to help her. Her enemies  
looked at her and laughed at her destruction.

**John 20:19-29**

**Jesus Appears to His Disciples**

**<sup>19</sup> On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the  
doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and  
said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The  
disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

**<sup>21</sup> Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." <sup>22</sup> And  
with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive anyone's sins,  
their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

## **Jesus Appears to Thomas**

**<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”**

**But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”**

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

**<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”**

**<sup>29</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”**

## **Reflection on Blue Christmas**

Blue. The color is used to name and evoke sadness, melancholy, despair. Hence, we have the music genre known as the blues. At this time of year, when everyone is energized with excitement and expectation, those of us who have suffered some form of loss – the loss of a loved one, a long-held dream or desire – can only notice the holes left in our lives, and we may become paralyzed by our losses.

**If it is true, as the saying goes, that “grief is the price we pay for love,” then this service affords us the opportunity to recall and remember the gifts we have lost. That is not to say that our pain and sadness are not real—they are! But when we survey the past and review the gifts of loved ones and opportunities once cherished but that are no longer with us, we might find some balance. The memories might accentuate our loss. They might demand that we focus on that which is no longer. But we are not alone in our remembering. We are gathered in this community, and GOD is with us.**

At this time of year, surrounded by all the hustle and bustle, it can seem as if no one notices us or remembers our grief, as if we don't exist. But the Holy One knows us, remembers us, and is sad with us. The Holy One has experienced loss . The Holy One experiences our loss. So, we are not alone.

**Blue is also the color of the sea and the color of the sky – arms of the Creator holding everything together, holding us together. The sea and sky are a universal bracket surrounding us, weeping with us, hurting with us. And they are holding life and love for us when we have the strength to find these gifts again.**

**Solo**

**Blue Christmas**

## **Prayers of the Faithful**

Holy One, sometimes we feel overwhelmed and powerless, paralyzed by our fears, distracted from our loved ones. In this time of light and merriment, we are only able to experience shadow and hopelessness. We know you share our sorrow with us, and we share our sorrow with one another. In this wintertime of grief. We hold out to one another the love you offer. Restore to us the summer of our lives where there is green, where there is joy, where there is fulfilment. Draw us into your warmth that we may once again share the promise of your eternal life, where pain melts away and your hope heals. We pray for your peace. Amen.

## **Hymn**

### **All Poor Ones and Humble**

**VU 68**

1 All poor ones and humble and all those who stumble,  
    come hasten and feel not afraid;  
for Jesus, our treasure, with love past all measure,  
    in lowly poor manger was laid.  
Though wise ones who found him  
    laid rich gifts around him,  
yet oxen they gave him their hay,  
and Jesus in beauty accepted their duty;  
    contented in manger he lay.

Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him;  
    our service he ne'er can despise;  
whose love still is able to show us that stable,  
    where softly in manger he lies.

2 The Christ Child will lead us, the Good Shepherd feed us  
    and with us abide till his day.  
Then hatred he'll banish; then sorrow will vanish,  
    and death and despair flee away.  
And he shall reign ever, and nothing shall sever  
    from us the great love of our King;  
    His peace and his pity  
    shall bless his fair city  
    his praises we ever shall sing.

Then haste we to show him the praises we owe him;  
    our service he ne'er can despise;  
whose love still is able to show us that stable,  
    where softly in manger he lies.

## **Commissioning and Benediction**

We have named our pain and grief.

**We have been embraced by God's love and the care of this community of faith.**

Now we leave this place , willing to share boldly God's hope and love with a hurting creation.

**Let us go in peace and love to serve God.**

Go now in peace, never be afraid  
God will go with you each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,  
Know God will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love and show you believe  
Reach out to others so all the world can see.  
God will be there, watching from above  
Go now in peace, in faith and in love.  
Amen, amen, amen!

## **Postlude**

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