

Solidarity in Suffering and Compassion

[The service begins with the presider(s) lighting a Christ candle]

Presider: Let us settle into the presence of God by singing together ...

MUSIC Bless the Lord My Soul.... (Matt lead, repeat)

Introduction of Theme

Presider: People of God!. Tonight we gather here for a few moments of remembrance and prayer. Remembrance especially of brothers and sisters in Pittsburgh who were worshipping at the Tree of Life Synagogue last year on this very day. Tree of Life is, a synagogue, located in -of all places- Mr Rogers Neighborhood, Squirrel Hill. Taking THAT reality in for Presbyterians and many others holds a special irony.

Beyond the Neighborhood, the Tree of Life shootings remind us of too many other times and places across this country and the world where people of faith have been gathered- to worship, only to be attacked in the midst of their prayers. Coudersport Pa, Sutherland Springs Texas, Quebec City Canada, Charleston, South Carolina, Christ Church, New Zealand...the list is much longer. (pause)

We are more afraid of the brokenness in our world than ever. But that doesn't mean we, as Christians, have to be ruled by our fear. Let us join tonight in a solidarity of suffering and compassion, remembering the people and events of October 27th last year- and remembering all faith communities who have been touched by violence. And, by sitting with our fears, may we find God, and be in prayer for those who cannot.

Let us respond together to the invocations found in *We Remember Them*, a prayer for Jewish mourners by Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer:

[From The Rabbi's Manual:]

Speaker: In the rising of the sun and in its going down,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: When we are weary and in need of strength,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

2.

Speaker: When we are lost and sick of heart,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: When we have joys we yearn to share,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us,
as

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: In the opening of buds and in the birth of spring,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

Speaker: In the beginning of the year and when it ends,

Congregation: WE REMEMBER THEM

[Pause for Meditation]

SHEPHERD ME, O GOD

[Everyone sings this refrain following each reading.] **TEACH:**

“Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.”

Haugen

The musical score for 'Haugen' is written on two staves. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, with dynamics *mp* and *mf*. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics, with a dynamic of *mp*. Chords are indicated below the lyrics.

Shep-herd me, O God, be - yond my wants, be -
 Fm D^b A^b E^b

yond my fears, from death in - to life. _____
 Cm D^b B^bm Cm Fm B^bm F Fm B^b F

Psalm 23

Reader: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. God makes me lie down in green pastures; God leads me beside quiet waters. God restores my soul. God guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.

Reader: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.

Reader: You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.

Prayer

Presider: Let us pray to God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the source of all holiness, and ask to be led in holiness of life.

Response: May we be holy as you are holy.

Presider: Gracious and generous God, you call us to be your daughters and sons. Grant that we proclaim your Good News during difficult times.

Response: May we be holy as you are holy.

Presider: Holy Spirit, lead us to wisdom in these chaotic times. We are disheartened and unsure. Help us to discern your will.

Response: May we be holy as you are holy.

Presider: As we “remember” through our own faith tradition, we know that we yearn to be a light of Jesus’ healing for one another and for the whole world. Help us to help one another: let us be there for one another in order to dispel the darkness and dismay; let us be there for one another to share comfort; and let us be there with one another to shine the light of the kingdom into our broken systems and structures. Amen.

Readings

Presider introduces the readings: This evening we are going to share some readings on suffering, compassion, and our lives as Christians and followers of Jesus. So let us listen and pause to reflect after each reading.

Reader 1: Excerpts from *Your Sorrow is My Sorrow* by Joyce Rupp:

Faithful Shelter,
 My life has suddenly changed.
 I feel numb and unbelieving,
 Stunned and alarmed.
 It does not seem possible that my life
 Could be so quickly turned upside down.

Comfort me, Abiding Companion.
 Wait with me while I try to grasp the truth.
 Slowly reveal to me what I need to accept.

As the layers of the days ahead unfold

Keep me safe in the shelter of your love.

Abide with me, abide with me.

Faithful Shelter,

Our lives have suddenly changed.

We feel numb and unbelieving,

Stunned and alarmed.

It does not seem possible that our lives

Could be so quickly turned upside down.

Comfort us, Abiding Companion.

Wait with us while we try to grasp the truth.

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Keep us safe in the shelter of your love.

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[Pause for Silent Reflection]

Reader 2: from *Paul's Letter to the Colossians – Col 3:12-15*

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgives you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

[Pause for Silent Reflection]

Reader 3: *A reading from Loving Kindness by Sharon Salzberg: "Developing the Compassionate Heart"*

Sometimes we think that to develop an open heart, to be truly loving and compassionate, means that we need to be passive, to allow others to abuse us, to smile and let anyone do what they want with us. Yet this is not what is meant by compassion. Quite the contrary. Compassion is not at all weak. It is the strength that arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world.

Compassion allows us to bear witness to that suffering, whether it is in ourselves or others, without fear; it allows us to name injustice without hesitation, and to act strongly, with all the skill at our disposal. To develop this mind state of compassion is to learn to live with sympathy for all living beings, without exception.

[Pause for Silent Reflection]

Reader 4: Words of Promise and Hope from Revelation 21: 1-6:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home^[a] of God is among mortals.

God will dwell^[b] with them;

they will be God’s peoples,^[c]

God himself will be with them;^[d]

⁴ God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

[Pause for Silent Reflection]

A Prayer for the World by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

Let the rain come and wash away the ancient grudges, the bitter hatred held and nurtured over the generations. Let the rain wash away the memory of the hurt, the neglect.

Then let the sun come out and fill the sky with rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal us wherever we are broken.

7.
Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each other clearly.

So that we can see beyond labels, beyond accents, gender or skin color.

Let the warmth and brightness of the sun melt our selfishness.

So that we can share the joys and feel the sorrows of our neighbors.

And let the light of the sun be so strong that we will see all as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain, bring forth flowers to surround us with beauty.

And let the mountains teach our hearts to reach upward to heaven. AMEN

[Pause for Silent Reflection]

Prayer

Gracious and Holy One, tonight we pray for the three Jewish congregations who meet at the Tree of Life Synagogue as they remember the tragic events of last year. We pray for those spouses, children, loved ones, responders and a whole community whose pain of loss continues....continues even as love and grace from You have begun to weave themselves back into daily life through the voices, hands and feet- the prayers of so many in and beyond Squirrel Hill.

We hold in prayer all those for whom this remembering cuts too close to the bone: others who feel and know that their lives and livelihoods, their homes and houses of worship are threatened or worse, have been attacked by the rising normalcy of words and deeds perpetuated in the name of bigotry, hatred, fear, and isolationism.

We remember, far too many, whose lives have been cut short in places set apart for intentional time with one another and with You. Our hearts and spirits are broken by the violation of these spaces that have taken place far too often. And we remember as well, that the violence perpetuated is not exclusive to these spaces of sanctuary.

We grieve holy one, even as we seek to be a presence for healing.

Take us beyond prayers oh Christ, to spoken words and actions that embody "thy kingdom come" for your world. Even when it is hard. Even when it hurts. Even when we not certain of the way.

As Christians,. Our Way is grounded in you O Christ... So let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us saying together.....

8
Music: O Lord Hear Our Prayer

Readings

COURAGE by Bernard Dozier

It takes unspeakable courage –
To be born, to crawl, and
To be young and inexperienced.

It takes enormous courage –
To grow up, to dream, to work, and
To risk making mistakes.

It takes steadfast courage –
To be disciplined, to take responsibility,
And to keep trying after disappointments.

It takes gallant courage –
To be rich, to be poor, and
To always give unstintingly of self.

It takes dauntless courage –
To balance successes
With defeats and
To still relish life's sweetness.

It takes invincible courage –
To grow older, to not speak aged counsel,
And to peruse mortality with a calm eye.

It takes noble courage –
To be a gentle soul,
To seek one's God, and
Christlike mettle to live like God.

COURAGE!

9.
Benediction

St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians: Phil 4:6-9

Paul Said: Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Go in Peace. Seeking, Claiming, Living, the Neighborhood and World of Gods Beloved People

Amen

Amen

Adapted from VOR/LE National Working Group service for 9/11 Memorial and A Prayer by Rev. Alison Miller.