

Spirit of Grace

ELCA UMC



December 31st, 2023

First Sunday of Christmas/Blessing the End of the Year

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

Call to Worship

The year has thinned, the light seems weaker
the year is tired, and the season running out
**yet here we are in the place of life
for this place believes
in things beyond time and season**

we might live in the echo of stables and incarnation
holding onto faith in the year's last days
**yet what do we do
but perform acts of renewal and rebirth
of baptism and hope
of seeking new life shaped in Jesus Christ**

so let us gather
on what the world sees as the cusp of the year
yet we know as another day
in the eternity of love

**and celebrate who we are
and who we are yet to be**

come let us be together
and worship

Centering Hymn

In Silence We Wait
ACS 998, sung three times

Confession & Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,
the Word made flesh,
our life and our salvation.

Amen.

Trusting the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior,
let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

God of life,
**you promise good news of great joy for all people,
and call us to be messengers of your peace.
We confess that too often we hoard our joy,
our resources, and our security.
We nurture conflict and build barriers.
We neglect the needs of our neighbors
and ignore the groaning of creation.
Have mercy on us.
Where we are self-centered, open our hearts.
Where we are reluctant, give us courage.
Where we are cynical, restore our trust.
Renew us with your grace
and give us again the hope of eternal life in you.
Amen.**

Hear the good news:

We are children of God and heirs of God's promises
through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In ☩ Jesus we are forgiven and redeemed.

Sing with joy, for all the ends of the earth
shall know the salvation of God.

Amen.

Opening Hymn

Oh God, Our Help in Ages Past
ELW 632 – verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 6

Greeting & Prayer of the Day

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, you have placed us in a world of space and time, and through the events of our lives you bless us with your love. Grant that in the new year we may know your presence, see your love at work, and live in the light of the event that gives us joy forever—the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-20, 22

There is a time for everything,
a season for every purpose under heaven:
a season to be born and a season to die;
a season to plant and a season to harvest;
a season to hurt and a season to heal;
a season to tear down and a season to build up;
a season to cry and a season to laugh;
a season to mourn and a season to dance;
a season to scatter stones and a season to gather them;
a season for holding close and a season for holding back;
a season to seek and a season to lose;
a season to keep and a season to throw away;
a season to tear down and a season to mend;
a season to be silent and a season to speak;
a season to love and a season to hate;
a season for hostilities and a season for peace.

What do workers gain from their efforts? I have reflected on this while learning all the kinds of work God gives to humankind. God has made everything in harmony with the divine; yet although the Almighty has imbued eternity in our soul, we are unable to grasp the totality of God's work from beginning to end.

What I do know is that what is best for us is to be happy and enjoy life as long as we live. And God's gift to us is to eat and drink and find fulfillment in our work.

I understand that whatever God does will endure for eternity; nothing can be added to it, nothing can be taken away. God makes it this way to keep reverence for the sacred alive in us.

That which is, has always been;
that which is to be, has already been;
and God calls the past back into existence.

Yet I notice that under the sun there is crime where justice should be, and the corrupt where the good should be. I told myself that God will judge both the good and the corrupt at the appointed time for every issue and every deed.

I told myself that God tests us to teach us that we're just like the animals. For our fate and the fate of all living things are the same; as one dies, so dies the other. We all have the same breath, and we have no advantage over the other forms of life. It's all a mist of air. We all go to the same place. All forms of life are dust, and return to dust.

In short, I see there is nothing better than that we enjoy our work, for this is our destiny; who among us can see what will come after us?

Word of God, Word of Life
Thanks be to God.

Psalm 8 (from Nan C. Merrill's *Psalms for Praying*)

O Love, my Beloved,
How Powerful is your Name in all the earth!
**You, whose glory is sung in heaven
by the angels and saints,
Who with the innocence and spontaneity of a child,
confound those who are mighty and proud,
You comfort the unloving and fearful.**

When I look up at the heavens,
at the work of Love's creation,
at the infinite variety of your Plan,
What is woman that You rejoice in her,
and man that You do delight in him?
**You have made humankind in your image,
You fill us with your Love;
You have made us co-creators of the earth!
Guardians of the planet!**
To care for all your creatures,
to tend the land, the sea,
and the air we breath;
all that You have made,
You have placed in our hands.

**O Love, my Beloved,
How powerful is your Name in all the earth!**

Second Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away, and the sea existed no longer. I also saw a new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride and groom on their wedding day.

And I heard a loud voice calling from the throne, "Look! God's Tabernacle is among humankind! God will live with them, they will be God's people and God will be fully present among them. The Most High will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more, for the old order has fallen."

The One who sat on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" and added, "Write this, for what I am saying is trustworthy and true."

And that One continued, "It is finished. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."

Word of God, Word of Life
Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Rev. Miranda Bermes-Goller

Hymn of the Day

My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness
ELW 251 – verses 1-3

Affirmation of Faith: A New Creed

Please stand as you are able as we confess our faith in God together:

**We are not alone
we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our redeemer and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Joys & Concerns

If you have any joys, concerns, or prayer requests to share, please type them into the comment section of the livestream so that we may lift them up together as a community.

Prayers of the People

Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

A brief silence.

God of the Ages, you inspire faith in our hearts and call us to rejoice with our whole selves at the salvation you bring. Make our churches places of belonging for all people in the fullness of their being. Raise up the gifts and the witness of people who are neurodivergent, living with disability, or bearing invisible illness.

Merciful God,

Receive our prayer.

God of the Ages, your praise is sung throughout creation in all times and seasons. As the new year turns, ground us in your changeless and sustaining love. Keep us attentive to the rhythms of the cosmos and inspire us to live in harmony with all the earth.

Merciful God,

Receive our prayer.

God of the Ages, turn the hearts of the nations toward justice, righteousness, and peace. Increase cooperation for justice between countries, commonwealths, political parties, and diplomatic leaders.

We pray to you especially in this time of war, oppression, and genocide in the Holy Land. Lead us in the way of solidarity with the oppressed and peace for all people – give us the strength we need to not stay silent in situations of injustice. Heal the hurt and harm, console the bereaved and afflicted, protect the innocent and helpless, and deliver all who remain in peril.

Merciful God,

Receive our prayer.

God of the Ages, let this community of faith be a joyful and welcome place for all ages and generations. Teach us to honor the wisdom of children, the inquisitiveness of youth, the thoughtfulness of adults, and the knowledge of elders.

Merciful God,

Receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Since we have such great hope in your promises, O God, we lift these and all of our prayers to you in confidence and faith; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Offering

5th Sunday Special Offering: Hood River Warming Shelter

At this time, if you are willing and able, please consider giving to Spirit of Grace Church to support our ongoing ministry. Checks can be mailed to 1140 Tucker Road, Hood River OR, 97031. Online Donations can be made through the link below:
[Spirit of Grace Church](#)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God our provider,
by your merciful hand
abundance springs up from the earth.
Receive and bless these gifts of your own bounty.
Let them be a sign of your steadfast love
and faithfulness for all people.
Nourished by your Word, send us out to proclaim
your good news of liberation and release,
brought to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

The Disciples' Prayer – *sung to the tune of "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"*

Our Father, Lord on heav'n's high throne, most holy be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth – in heav'n the same. Give us this day the food we need; forgiven may we be; into temptation do not lead; from evil set us free.
Yours is the kingdom; unto You in grateful love we bow; and Yours the pow'r; Lord, let us view your mighty presence now. The glory Yours; Your praise be sung by angel hosts and all in ev'ry land, by ev'ry tongue forevermore! Amen.

Sending Song:

Go Tell It on the Mountain
ELW 290 – verses 1-3

Blessing

God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.
God grant you grace and peace at the dawn of this new year.

Amen.

All flesh is grass, but the word of God remains forever.
God who is eternal keep you in hope of the resurrection.

Amen.

The past, the present, and the future rest in God's hands.
God guard your coming in and your going forth,
this new year and forevermore.

Amen.

Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. The Spirit of God is alive in you!

Thanks be to God!



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Church Office Hours
Closed on Fridays
Pastor Miranda Bermes-Goller
M-Th 9-1, or by appointment
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Tuesday 10-1

Attributions

Call to Worship: written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on Listening to the Stones.
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