

4th Week of Advent: Love Liturgy

Invocation

In the words of the late Rev. Derek Terry, "Pay attention to what your body already knows, to what you see, and sense, and feel." As we enter this final Sunday of Advent—and as we have moved through the invitations of the church to pray on hope, peace, and joy—what does your body know about the love of God? What does your heart see, sense, and feel? Perhaps you arrive to worship more like Ezekial, whose heart of stone was transformed into a heart of flesh. Maybe you enter in like Mary, who held many things lovingly in her heart. Or perhaps you come to worship as if it were Pentecost, with hearts on fire. However you come, you are welcome. Whomever you are, you are worthy. O God of Love and Life, let us worship you with hearts filled with your Spirit. Amen.

Litany of the Advent Candle

One: In our Gospel reading today, the angel Gabriel talks to Mary. If an angel, a messenger of God, were to appear here this morning, what might they ask us?

All: What would they want us to know, understand, or notice?

One: What might they have to say to us in our lives right now?

All: What message of comfort would they offer? And how would we receive it?

One: In the scriptures, angels often say, "do not be afraid." Yet, for so many of us, daily living brings up so much to be afraid of, so many things to be anxious about, and worries that need tending to. How might we receive such a message with the lives we are currently living?

All: How might we feel fear at our front, with God's courage and assurance at our back?

One: When there is reason to doubt and struggle to work through, is this not how faith is born? As Mary and Joseph navigated trials and systems of oppression...

All: God was born, even so.

One: And as we journey through the longest night of the year...

All: We light these candles into a whole circle of light, even so. (Light the candles.)

One: For, "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow..."

All: "Can separate us from God's love." Amen. (Rom. 8:38).

Prayer of Transformation and Grace

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). What a gift to be known this way, by our ways of loving. When the harshness of life makes our discipleship difficult, guide us back to union with you, O God of Grace, and help us to remove all obstacles to belonging and wholeness. May we remember that we can always return to you and that we are never outside of your love. Amen.

Invitation to Offering

As we bring this Advent season to a close, may we offer up what we are called to bring here with love. May we not move through this moment past the gift of this time together, this invitation to give and receive alike. Heart of the Divine, guide us by the power of our connection with you, to lives of service offered here, but lived into each day. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

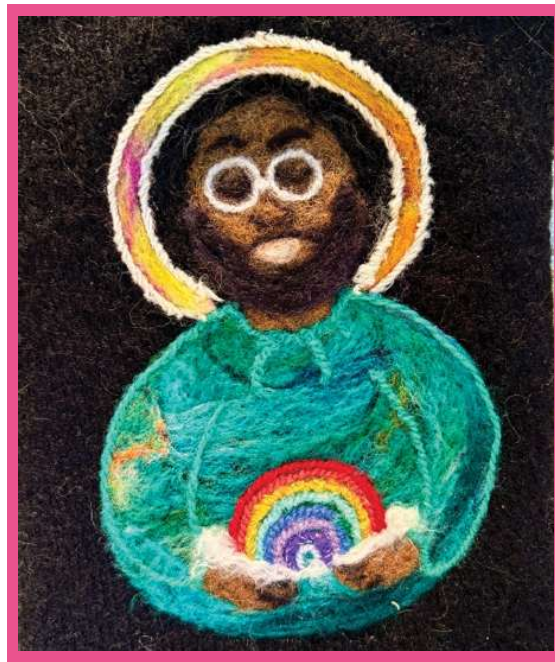
We dedicate these gifts as a practice of devotion, of loving attention toward that which gives life and love in our world. From this communal basket to the needs within and beyond these walls, may this offering give solace to the strained, care to the hurting, and support to that which is fractured. O God of Love and Loving, receive these gifts placed before you and from the ground of our being. Amen.



THE GREATEST OF THESE...

LOVE...

Children's Moment



The Rev. Derek A. Terry was the Executive Director of the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ. He was a minister with a presence, a voice, and a message that could fill the room with his warm spirit and big heart. He had a passion for sharing God's word that we are all beloved and worthy of love and belonging, no exceptions. As a gay black man, Derek openly shared about his own experience of exclusion and how important and life-giving faith communities can be when they are open and affirming of LGBTQIA+ people. Moreover, Derek not only longed for a more inclusive church, he helped build and foster communities of welcome across diverse backgrounds and lived experiences wherever he served.

The Rev. Derek also was a passionate and talented visual artist, creating compelling works in graphite, watercolor, marker, and other media. He was often found using his creativity to advance difficult conversations and to create coloring books and pages to celebrate influential black figures and events.

During a keynote speech, he wisely reminded the Church that "sometimes the holiest thing you can do is stand by someone and keep their arms lifted... It's not about fixing; it's about faithfulness. It's not about always having the right words; it's about presence." How can you be a loving presence to someone in your life today or this week? How have you received someone showing up for you lately? This advent, how do you see the connection between being faithful and being loving?



THE GREATEST OF THESE...

LOVE...