

4 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: LOVE December 24, 2023

LITANY OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

One: O God of Garlands and Light, we've arrived at this final Advent candle.

All: We've kindled ourselves in this tradition and wrapped our nights in your light.

One: We close this circle where it all began, in love—in fierce abiding love—as familiar words arise in our minds:

All: Did our hearts not burn within us, while He talked with us on the way?

One: Let us remember how we do not journey alone.

All: And receive a blessing from the evergreen trees, who give us permission to grow—and let go—at our own pace, season by season, here in this place.

Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: Beloved, though we'd hope that this season would bring out the best in us,

All: we sometimes show up more impatient than present, more hardened than heartened.

One: Sometimes the pressure of the calendar, expectations, old dynamics, and the chaos of life can make us act and even believe that we are far from love and loving.

All: But remembering that we are never outside your grace, let us repent and make ready the way for return.

One: Let us recognize the Beloved becoming flesh in ourselves and each other.

All: And may we have mercy, ever more mercy on us all. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The love of our God is not small. It is not flimsy or trite. It overflows in abundance, like water turned into wine. It weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice. May God's love be experienced here, if not believed—or perhaps understood, if not felt. May the Trinity, the Divine Community, bless us all now with the wisdom of right-relationships, of giving and receiving, of coming together and taking space, of grace upon everlasting grace. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Scripture tells us that love “binds everything together.” It is how we are held. It is how we exist at all. Let us reawaken ourselves to love's aliveness in this community and our wider church community. Let us remember that the Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross is a special offering of the UCC because it lifts up those among us who are struggling, our retired pastors and their spouses who have suffered emergencies, health struggles, and poverty. This offering is a response from the wider church to answer God's call to protect the vulnerable and overwhelm all suffering with love. May Mary's “yes” find a “yes” in us. Open in us what love is requiring of us today, O God, and may we respond in faith. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

As much as we have our attention on the star and the manager just around the corner—and all that we want to do and say—may we not forget to let love in. For the Beloved longs for us, to listen to us, to bear witness to us, to be made flesh and live among us. As the mystics say, it is not just about if or how we find God—but even more, it is allowing ourselves to be found by the Beloved in return. To remove all barriers to belonging with the one who created us and thus to all creation around us, too. So may we open ourselves to our very essence, to the love that was first given to us. Amen.

These worship resources were written by the Rev. Elyse Berry, who serves as the Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development for the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) of the United Church of Christ.