



How does a
weary world
rejoice?

*A Liturgy for
for the Weary*

Written by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

INTRODUCTION

About this Service

For those who have experienced loss, the joy of the holiday season can often feel elusive and out of reach. As a result, churches around the world have adopted the practice of having a “Blue Christmas” or a “Longest Night” service during the Advent season. These services are designed to provide space for prayer, reflection, and remembrance amidst the twinkle lights and holiday hustle and bustle.

If you have picked up this individual “Liturgy for the Weary,” then I imagine you are seeking some of this quiet space. Therefore, whether you have experienced loss or grief, whether you are burned out or afraid, this at-home liturgy is for you.

Bring your grief. Bring your weariness. Bring your fatigue, and allow yourself time to reflect and draw near to God. My prayer is that these words and this ritual can bring you one step closer to joy. May you find peace in your journey.

With joy and hope,
Rev. Sarah A. Speed

Setting + Supplies

Settle into a comfortable and cozy place in your home. Collect the following items to accompany you during this time:

- Candles and matches or a lighter.
- A source to play music (phone, computer, etc).
- Bible.
- Journal and pen or pencil.

GATHERING

Set the Tone

Cue up your favorite Christmas song. As you listen, gather a few candles from around your house. Light one. Save the rest for candle lighting later in the liturgy. Focus on the glow of the candlelight and allow the music and the light to mark a space set apart.

Need some song recommendations? Try “O Holy Night”¹ or “Winter Snow”² by Audrey Assad. Or you can follow our *How does a weary world rejoice?* playlist on Spotify.³

Reading

Read the opening poem a few times through as you settle into this moment. Underline the phrases that stand out to you, adding your voice to these words.

Weariness Feels Like

Weariness feels like an ache in your bones,
or a slow leak from the heart—
a leak that causes hope to pool at your feet.
Weariness feels like the wind knocked out of you—
all of a sudden, it’s impossible to breathe.
Weariness feels like an oversized coat.
It catches on door handles and knocks over water glasses.
You turn into a clumsy mess.
Weariness can hit you all at once—
when the phone rings,
when the bill arrives,
when the *New York Times* sends you an alert.
But weariness can also hem and haw its way into your life,
bit by bit, chipping away at resolve.

And one short poem cannot change this truth—
the weary state of our grief-stricken hearts.
But one short poem can remind you
the one thing we so often forget:

that I can wear your jacket for a while.
And we can try to stop the leak in your heart.
And if that doesn’t work,
then we’ll stand under the night sky
to look at the stars
and remember that we do not
walk this valley alone.

—Rev. Sarah A. Speed

1 Author: Placide Cappeau (1847). Translator: John S. Dwight. Tune: CANTIQUE DE NOEL. Public Domain.

2 “Winter Snow” by Audrey Assad. © 2019 Fortunate Fall Records / Tone Tree Music.

3 Follow us on Spotify: open.spotify.com/user/pdfh4c8bgagfmgklnjflat37?si=9b09b6f675c74e49

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GATHERING *(cont.)*

Advent Candle Lighting

If you have an Advent wreath at home, then you can use the following liturgy to light your Advent candles. If you do not have an Advent wreath at home, then simply read through the following words, lighting the candle(s) that you have. A hodge podge collection works just as well as an Advent wreath!

In the Advent season, we light the candle of hope.

Tonight, I light it for all who feel hopeless. Tonight, this light shines bright for prisoners, for patients with chronic illness, for individuals fighting to get out of debt, for refugees waiting for a safe place to rest, and for relationships that have no clear way forward. Tonight, I light this candle for the hopeless.

May God's hope find them now.

In this season, we light the candle of peace.

Tonight, I light the candle of peace again for all who need peace. This light shines bright for the anxious and unsettled—for those in seasons of transition and discernment, for all who struggle with mental health, and for people navigating rocky, new beginnings.

May God's peace find them now.

In this season, we light the candle of joy.

Tonight, I light the candle of joy for all who need it. May this light shine for those who are overburdened, overstretched, worn out, and worn down. May this candle shine for those who need a good laugh, even in seasons of grief.

May God's joy find them now.

In this season, we light the candle of love.

Tonight, I light the candle of love again for all who need it. May this light shine for loved ones lost, for love that has been betrayed, for love that has been neglected or forgotten, and for all who long for love and find themselves lonely.

May God's love find them now.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

THE WORD

Prayer for Illumination

Read the following prayer in preparation for the scripture reading. You can say this out loud or silently.

Creator God,
For so long I have been bending under the weight
of my own grief, exhaustion, and stress.
However, today,
like a flower bending toward the sun,
I am leaning toward you in hope.
Speak a word of encouragement to me now.
Help me to see that I am not alone.
And warm my weary bones from the inside out.
I am listening.
I am bending.
I am seeking after you.
With an open heart I pray,
amen.

Scripture Reading

Pick one or two of the following readings, based on what you are drawn to. Read them each a few times through. Circle or underline the words and phrases that stand out to you. Try reading the words both silently and out loud to help yourself hear different things in each pass through.

- **Isaiah 40:1-11**
Written during the exile when many of the Israelites were captives in a foreign land, this is a text of lament, asking for God's comfort.
- **Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19**
This is a psalm of lament with imagery of being fed "bread of tears," and a refrain asking for God to restore us.
- **Psalms 126**
In this psalm, those who sow tears go out with shouts of joy.
- **Lamentations 3:19-24**
This passage is a prayer of honesty, acknowledging individual suffering while also declaring that God's steadfast love never ceases.
- **John 14:25-27**
This passage is a moving reminder from Jesus that his peace is with us.
- **Psalms 23**
This psalm names the harsh reality of the valley of the shadow of death, but it also names God's presence with us there.
- **Psalms 121:1-8**
This psalm offers comfort and hope, reminding us that our help comes from God, and that we are never alone.

RESPONSE

Journaling

Take a moment to journal and reflect on the following questions:

- Where do you need comfort in your life?
- What does weariness feel like for you this season? What does joy feel like?
- Who or what are you praying for at this moment?
- Write a prayer of lament to God, a prayer of grief. Let this prayer be a healing release.

Closing Prayer

God of my joy
and God of my weariness,
I have brought my worn-down heart to you today—
a heart full of grief,
a heart carrying fear,
a heart, tender to the touch.
I have brought my weariness to you,
because I *know* that you are present with me in the valley.
Therefore, as I prepare to leave the safety and comfort of this moment,
as I prepare to return to the fullness of my life,
I ask that you would continue to walk with me.
Stay by my side through the valley.
Stay by my side as I climb my way out,
just stay close.
For I cannot move from weariness to joy without you.
With honesty and gratitude, I give you these prayers of my heart—
those named and left unnamed. I give them all to you.
Amen.

Sending

As you are ready, blow out your candles. Take a deep breath. Release the tension in your shoulders, and thank yourself for giving yourself time to process, pray, and reflect.

Passing of the Peace

Send someone you love a quick text message or email to let them know you are thinking of them. In this way, you leave the comfort of a private moment and return to the world, leaning on the love that surrounds you.



About the Author

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Rev. Sarah Speed (*she/her*) is the Associate Pastor for Young Adults and Membership at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a degree in Social Work, and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Columbia Theological Seminary. Sarah loves to combine her love of all things creative with her passion for God. She believes that the

Church has a responsibility to open every door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities. Sarah feels called to live her life welcoming people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world. Writing is her most beloved spiritual practice. You can find her daily poems on Instagram and Facebook: @writingthegood | writingthegood.com

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