

A Holiday Remembrance Service

MUSIC FOR GATHERING

WORDS OF WELCOME

SONG “Where Are You Christmas?”¹

as sung by Faith Hill

Where are you Christmas? Why can't I find you?
Why have you gone away?
Where is the laughter you used to bring me?
Why can't I hear music play?

My world is changing, I'm rearranging.
Does that mean Christmas changes, too?

Where are you Christmas? Do you remember
the one you used to know?
I'm not the same one, see what the time's done.
Is that why you have let me go?

Christmas is here, everywhere.
Christmas is here, if you care.
Oh, if there is love in your heart and your mind
you will feel like Christmas all the time.

I feel you Christmas. I know I found you.
You never fade away.
The joy of Christmas stays here inside us,
fills each and every heart with love.

Where are you Christmas?
Fill your heart with love.

HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS²

Video by Alan Wolfelt

“Understanding Your Grief: Hope for the Holidays” (17:02)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N32kzjlk3C8&t=636s>)

CANDLELIGHTING CEREMONY

The names of those we honor will be read at this time. When your loved one's name is read, please come forward, light your candle from the pillar candle by tipping your unlit candle into the flame.³ If you need assistance, please remain in your seat. One of our staff will come to you, light your candle and give it back to you.

SONG “Different Kind of Christmas”

as sung by Mark Schultz

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PBEMfbWq_Y

Snow is falling Christmas eve
Lights are coming on up and down the street
The sound of carols fills the air
And people rushing home, families everywhere
Putting candles in the windows
Lights upon the tree
But there's no laughter in this house, not like there used to be
There're just a million little memories that remind me you're not here
It's just a different kind of Christmas this year

In the evening fires glow
Dancing underneath the mistletoe
A letter left from Santa Claus
Won't be the same this year in our house because

There's one less place set at the table
One less gift under the tree
And a brand-new way to take their place inside of me
I'm unwrapping all these memories
Fighting back the tears
It's just a different kind of Christmas this year

There're voices in the driveway
Family's right outside the door
And we'll try to make this Christmas like the ones we've had before
As we gather round the table, I see joy on every face
And I realize what's still alive is the legacy you made

It's time to put the candles in the windows, the lights upon the tree
It's time to fill this house with laughter like it used to be
Just because you're up in heaven, doesn't mean you're not near
It just a different kind of Christmas
It's just a different kind of Christmas this year⁵

SENDING FORTH (read in unison)

Love never ends.
When all else fails, love remains.
We give thanks for the gift of love made known through the lives of those we have honored on this day.
We give thanks for the light and love (your loved one's name) shared to make us the people we are today
And for that part of (your loved one's name) that lives and grows in us
We give thanks for his / her life that in love will never end.
Let those of us who remain in this life draw closer to one another,
And let us serve one another in love.
May the power of eternal love order our days and guard our nights.
Amen. ⁴

At this time, Please extinguish your candles.

Service Notes



As host, deciding *when* to hold the service may be the most difficult choice with which you are faced. Most of us feel that stores putting out Christmas merchandise in October is very premature and even ridiculous. On the other hand, Christmas music in the stores and on the radio, Christmas trees and light displays in early November are a reality. They can be a significant trigger for grieving folks. My professional choice has been to offer a memorial service the weekend before Thanksgiving. People are likely to be beyond denying the holiday season is upon them *and* open to the help and support our service provides.

¹ Some professionals have found this song too “depressing” and without hope. Respectfully, I disagree. I am attempting to create divine momentum. To do that, I need to create a service that acknowledges the angst the bereaved may be experiencing about the coming holiday season. They may be experiencing what Alan Wolfelt calls “paradoxical emotionality” -a mix of happy and sad feelings. They may be anxious. In my opinion, *Where Are You Christmas* acknowledges both the pain of grief and the hope of Christmas. “*If you have love in your heart and your mind, you will feel like Christmas all the time...The joy of Christmas stays here inside us, fills each and every heart with love.*”

² Dr. Wolfelt of the Center for Loss and Life Transition has created several superb videos addressing the subject of holiday grief. These are available on YouTube. If you want to use a video as your “message” for the service, I suggest:

Understanding Your Grief: Hope for the Holidays
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N32kzjlk3C8&t=636s>

Alternatively, a chaplain or other experienced speaker could address the subject. At the end of these notes, I have included one message I delivered at a remembrance service.

³ Tipping the unlit candle into the flame of the larger pillar candle will help to prevent wax dripping on the floor or hands.

⁴ Adapted from *A Service of Committal*, The United Methodist Book of Worship (Copyright 1992, The United Methodist Publishing House) p. 157

⁵ As host of the service, I always print the lyrics of songs that are played. I assume there may be people present who cannot hear or understand the lyrics on the recording for a whole host of reasons. Also, music can stir deep emotions. Even after hearing the song attendees may not remember the words or may want to hear the song again.

A Sample Message for Holiday Remembrance Service

Holidays are stressful under the best of circumstances.

Imagine...

Shopping on Black Friday for a new dress or suit to wear to a loved one's funeral.

Getting a phone call at 4 a.m. Thanksgiving Day that an elderly parent is being transported to the emergency room.

Sitting vigil at a loved one's bedside from Thanksgiving Day through mid-December when they die.

I feel like something of an expert on grief during the holidays because I have done all those things. Death and grief are two things that do not take a holiday.

When a loved one has died, and the first (or second) holiday season rolls around it can make our grief more acute and painful.

Today I would like to share with you a few specific tips for coping with the holidays after loss. These are strategies I have learned in my own life experience and I have been taught by other bereaved individuals.

- ❖ **Set our intentions but stay flexible.** Bereaved individuals who have the most difficulty with the holiday season are those who give little thought to the challenges they will face. It is good to think about things that will be expected of us socially and how these will impact us emotionally. We can plan what we want to participate in and what we think will be too difficult. Consider what can be done to take the sting out of an activity or gathering. Even if we plan to do something, we may find we need to leave early or change our plans at the last minute. That's all right. This is a time when our needs take priority. It is not selfish. It is self-care!
- ❖ **Recognize our limitations.** Grief consumes our energy and leaves us exhausted in any season. With the extra demands of the holidays, we will likely need to lower our expectations. Shopping online, getting someone to do the shopping for us, staying home instead of traveling and many other accommodations are possible.

❖ **Keeping traditions or setting traditions aside.**

Some people find comfort in maintaining family traditions. Having Grandma's famous pecan pie at the Christmas dinner table may be perfect and comforting for one family. There are no right or wrong decisions. There is only what is right for you and your family. A mother and her two young boys faced the first Christmas after their husband / father died. They knew they could not pretend this Christmas would be like all the others. They made the decision to check into a hotel. They swam. They ordered pizza and ate in their room. They exchanged a few small gifts. I'm sure this is not how they have celebrated Christmas every year, but for that year it was just right for their family.

❖ **Keep it simple.**

Recognizing our limitations, what decisions can we make to simplify our holiday observance? What social or family commitments can we say "no" to? Let's look at our priorities and set aside activities or obligations that are not necessary.

❖ **Communicate!**

We all need to ask for help from time to time. This can be a hard thing to do. In the early days of grief, we may not even know what we need, and that's all right. During the holidays, however, we have an opportunity to ask for and receive help from others. Depending on our physical condition, we may need help cleaning our home, clearing snow off our sidewalk or wrapping presents. People want to be supportive, but they cannot read our minds. Sometimes, unless we tell them what we need and how they can help, they may be uncertain how to reach out.

It is also important to communicate within our family. A bereaved parent may want to be part of the family gathering but may also want the flexibility to leave early if they become too tired or overwhelmed. Talking about this ahead of time can help to avoid misunderstandings and hurt feelings later.

❖ **Within the parameters of any medical conditions, feel free to eat whatever you want.**

“Comfort food” is a real phenomenon. Comfort foods are typically energy dense, high fat, and sweet, such as chocolate, ice cream and french fries. These foods provide pleasure and temporarily make us feel better. I come from a long line of stress eaters. My family is the one that takes a pan of fudge to the surgical waiting room at the hospital when one of us is having surgery. When my dad died, and I was trying to gather my wits and pack to travel to be closer to family my husband called up the stairs and asked what he could do to help. I had been dairy-free for a few months, but my immediate response was “make me macaroni and cheese.” Some of you will understand that. Eating what we want in moderation is perhaps the best plan. Sometimes if we deny ourselves those comfort foods, we still turn to them later and then we overindulge.

Some people lose their appetites under stress. If that describes you, it is important to eat a healthy balance of foods in snack sizes throughout the day. You may want to visit with a physician about how to ensure you get the nutrition you need during bereavement.

❖ **Make this holiday season meaningful by helping others.**

Reaching out to others in need is a good way to gain perspective on our own situation. This is something that children or grandchildren can get involved in. Adopt a family in need. Visit someone who is lonely or isolated by winter weather. We can mend costumes for the children’s Christmas program or donate to a “mitten tree.” Taking a pan of cookies to the staff at a nursing home or hospice office – the people who cared for your loved one – can also be very meaningful.

❖ **Honor your loved one’s memory.**

Some find it especially meaningful to make a charitable donation in their loved one’s memory. We can attend special services like this one. Honoring the deceased’s memory may be as simple as lighting a candle each evening leading up to the holiday, a symbol of their presence with us always.

❖ **Remember the kids.**

While children and teens may not understand death the same way as adults, they feel the same feelings of grief when a loved one dies. In addition, they have special worries. Children may become very concerned to know that the adults in their lives are in pain. It is important to communicate with the kids in the family. Include them in the decision making. It is especially important for teenagers to feel that their ideas and opinions matter. Get kids involved in helping others. Lower the expectations on the kids, just as you have lowered expectations from yourself. Finally, remember that young children will act out their feelings, because they don't have the vocabulary or maturity to talk about their feelings. For assistance with talking to children about the holidays after loss, please see *Handling the Holidays: An Activity Book for Kids and Those Who Care for Them*.

<insert link>

In conclusion, grief does not take a holiday. As much as we want to avoid the feelings associated with grief the only path to healing from our loss is the path that leads through the pain. With some planning and communication, with self-awareness and self-care, this *can* be a meaningful holiday season.