



Blue Christmas 2025: Nothing Can Separate Us from the Love of God

7pm, Tuesday, December 23, 2025 St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA || Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 121; Romans 8:18-27, 31-39; Matthew 11:28-30|| The Rev'd Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord, our comforter and our constant companion. Amen.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Tonight we gather in a community called to step aside from the noise and static, social expectations and burdens that we may experience at Christmas time. We gather in acknowledgement that the longest night of the year is behind us, and in the quiet confidence of the increasing light ahead.

This evening, we gather, perhaps exhausted or sad, confounded or confused in need of each other and available for the reminder that even in our state of blue – for whatever reason, carrying whatever burden, God is with us. Perhaps even better than the simple acknowledgement of Emmanuel – God with us, is the fact that God knows exactly what our spiritual, experiential, physical or emotional burden is. God gets it, and loves us **and** is with us, no matter what.

Years ago, in a terribly difficult period – in the heart of the AIDS crisis, when friends and colleagues would literally greet each other with a tally of how many funerals they had attended that week, I found myself furious at God.

[Ever the lawyer, I would prayerfully prosecute my case against God in Jesus. I remember the litany that I would recite. “We faithfully prayed, we went to church regularly, we confessed our sins against God and our neighbor. We anointed the sick, worked to soothe the suffering, and where were you?! We

were doing everything we knew to do, and yet, men and women were dying. You healed Lazarus, why not heal – fill in the blank with any name now memorialized on the massive AIDS quilt.]

When Christmas rolled around, joy was out of the question. I would go to church and couldn't even fold my hands in prayer. My saving grace arrived as advice from a priest and an author. My priest, far from being shocked at my heart break and anger told me “just keep coming – keep showing up at church” which turned out to be very important. The second grace was offered by author Anne Lamott, who in her own period of darkness could muster only two words of prayer. Upon waking, she would pray to God, “Whatever”. And as she fell into bed at night she bookended her prayer life with “Oh well!”.

“Whatever” is an invitation to God – “I’m available. I may be angry, or hurt and limited in my ability to engage in any sort of spiritual stuff – so WHATEVER” and can you imagine the deep sigh of relief to be able to climb back into bed and sum up your day and day’s efforts for God with a resigned or even a non-plussed, “Oh well”. I’m forever grateful for each of those people those angels in our midst, my priest and Anne Lamott.

Together, they offered guidance on not giving up, not isolating or withdrawing from the world in my profound broken-heartedness. Not pretending that everything was ok, or faking my way through Christmas, but trusting in God and my neighbors.

I extend the same grace-filled guidance to you. Keep coming to church and being open to God’s possibilities. Stay connected with your friends and your family. God calls us to be in community. And community is crucial to our navigating through ANY major life milestones whether grief-infused or joyful.

God included the gift of community in the version of the Christmas story that we will read tomorrow and Thursday. It may be easy to miss. When the shepherds arrive in the stable in Bethlehem – when the community gathers and shares the stories of what the angels told them, it is a turning point for Mary. She must have been bewildered, disoriented, and exhausted after giving birth. It had been a few months since she’d heard from the angel – same for Joseph. But when the Shepherds arrived, and friends and townspeople gathered and shared their experience of the angel of the lord

telling them of Jesus' birth and where to go and look for him – Mary treasured what they said – and then pondered them in her heart.

It is the Shepherds' confirmation, the community coming together to share the stories that the angels had shared with them that gave Mary comfort, that helped a besieged and beleaguered community better understand the miraculous gift of Jesus' birth.

So, however you are arriving at this service, however you are navigating Christmas – whether you can fold your hands in prayer or simply manage two words.....you are in the right spot. Do your best to be here now. In the candlelight. In the quiet. In the company of others who know that faith and sorrow can coexist.

While Jesus does not offer us an explanation for whatever we are navigating, he also doesn't require us to be cheerful. He doesn't correct us or smite us, he invites us to lay down our burdens and he promises to give us rest.

So, we need not resolve anything tonight, or feign happiness. You needn't manufacture hope or express joy. Just keep showing up. Take God up on the offer and lay down whatever you are carrying. Whatever burden brings you here this evening. Even if just for this service, lay down what is weighing upon you and make room for and welcome the gifts of God's grace-filled rest.

Amen+