

**First Congregational UCC, Eagle River  
Worship – Sunday, February 7, 2021  
L. Gail Irwin, Interim Pastor**

**Announcements:**

Good morning! Welcome to worship at First Congregational UCC in Eagle River. Today we're having an experimental ZOOM worship service. Thanks for daring to try it out! We will be celebrating all the wonderful things about winter and also sharing ideas about how to survive it! **Why did God invent winter? To punish us or to bless us?**

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>. We will have a recorded service that day and I'll be sharing a compilation of your wonderful history stories and insights shared this past week. We also hope to have a brief outdoor service on that Wednesday night at 6:00 PM in the lot across the street where we will do a ritual to let go of things we need to let go of, and claim and keep what is valuable to take into the future.

I'll be doing a Lenten class for adults by Zoom on Tuesdays, starting February 23<sup>rd</sup>., on five purposes of the Church. Watch for more on that coming.

Please keep in your prayers all those who have lost loved ones and friends recently, including the family of Malcolm Fell, who died in Las Cruces, New Mexico last month. Be gentle with each other these days!

Winter is a season of intermingled joy and sadness. Let's open with a hymn that expresses that, shared by Larry George and Tobi Johanssen.

**Hymn: "In The Bleak Midwinter"**

(Text: Christina Rossetti; Tune: Cranham) CCLI #2399539  
(Larry George and Tobi Johanssen)

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**Opening Prayer:** (by Cal Wick)

Lord, In the midst of Winter, when the days are cold and wind can pierce,  
remind us of the warmth of your love.  
In the midst of Winter, when days are short, dawn comes late, and dusk arrives early,  
remind us that in the darkness your light still shines.  
In the midst of Winter,  
when the flowers of spring still lie hidden in the earth,  
when leaves are off the trees, and the world can seem bleak,  
remind us that Easter is but a short time away.  
And when in our lives we feel as if we are experiencing a season of winter,  
reach out to us with the power of your resurrection  
so that we may feel the warmth of your love and see your light  
that alone can take away the darkness of our soul. Amen.

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## A Moment with Children

This week was Groundhog's Day: the groundhog said 6 more weeks of winter

- How do you feel about that?
- What do you like or dislike about winter?
- What are your favorite things to do in winter time that you can't do other times?
- Anything you DON'T like about winter?
- Why do you think God made winter? As punishment? Or as gift?
- Whether winter is a punishment or a gift depends a lot on YOUR attitude!
  - If you hate winter, try going outside MORE and playing video games less; you might be surprised how fun it can be
  - If you love winter, coax a mom, dad or sibling or grandma outside and show them how great it is.

**Prayer: Dear God, thank you for winter! Thank you for long underwear, hats and mittens and socks to keep us warm. Thank you for snow to play sled and ski in; and for warm houses and beds, for soup and tea and hot chocolate to warm up after we play. Teach us to take care of nature so we can keep enjoying it! Amen.**

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## Sermon, Scripture and Conversation

- I. The bible only mentions snow and ice a few times; it was written from an arid Mediterranean climate, but some peaks and northern regions get snow.
  - a. Psalm 51: the whiteness of snow is a sign of purity and cleansing "*Wash me and I will be whiter than snow*".
  - b. Proverbs 25: snow is refreshing: *Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest are faithful messengers to those who send them; they refresh the spirit of their masters.*
  - c. Proverbs 31: says a virtuous woman knows how to bundle her family up: *She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson.* (I'm guessing they meant wool since they had sheep)
    - i. A Norwegian saying I learned here in Eagle River: *There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing*

In Psalm 147, winter snow and cold are among all the awe-inspiring features of nature God made that are worthy of praise! But listen for the little complaint the psalmist includes about cold weather:

**Scripture Readings:** Psalm 147:1-9, 14-18 (Susan Krivitchi)

<sup>1</sup>*Praise the LORD!*

*How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.*

<sup>2</sup>*The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.*

<sup>3</sup>*He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.*

<sup>4</sup>*He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.*

<sup>5</sup>*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.*  
<sup>6</sup>*The LORD lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.*  
<sup>7</sup>*Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre.*  
<sup>8</sup>*He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth,  
 makes grass grow on the hills.*  
<sup>9</sup>*He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry...*

...<sup>14</sup>*He grants peace within your borders; he fills you with the finest of wheat.*  
<sup>15</sup>*He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.*  
<sup>16</sup>*He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.*  
<sup>17</sup>*He hurls down hail like crumbs— who can stand before his cold?*  
<sup>18</sup>*He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.*

Did you hear it in verse 17? Winter is the season we love to hate!  
 But winter is fascinating,! Listen to the poet in Job 38:

**Job 38:6-13**

*God thunders wondrously with his voice;  
 he does great things that we cannot comprehend.*  
<sup>6</sup>*For to the snow he says, ‘Fall on the earth’;  
 and the shower of rain, his heavy shower of rain,  
<sup>7</sup>serves as a sign on everyone’s hand,  
 so that all whom he has made may know it.<sup>[b]</sup>*  
<sup>8</sup>*Then the animals go into their lairs  
 and remain in their dens.*  
<sup>9</sup>*From its chamber comes the whirlwind,  
 and cold from the scattering winds.*  
<sup>10</sup>*By the breath of God ice is given,  
 and the broad waters are frozen fast.*  
<sup>11</sup>*He loads the thick cloud with moisture;  
 the clouds scatter his lightning.*  
<sup>12</sup>*They turn round and round by his guidance,  
 to accomplish all that he commands them  
 on the face of the habitable world.*  
<sup>13</sup>***Whether for correction, or for his land,  
 or for love, he causes it to happen.***

This poet sees the drama of winter weather as signs of God’s power and presence and greatness. S/he speculates about why God made winter weather: was it to correct us because we’ve been bad? Is God just taking care of the land and regenerating growth in the soil? Or is it a form of love God shows us? Does God just want to give us something beautiful?

Those questions about winter echo the questions about God’s favor and punishment in other parts of the book of Job.

II. I see two ways people deal with snow and cold here and in Wisconsin. **We go outside, or we go inside!**

**How do you feel about winter? Do you see it as a punishment from God? Or a gift? Or just a “necessary evil”?**

- A. **Going outdoors:** In Scandinavia, they have the darkest, long winters and are ranked as the happiest people in the world. Why? Because they GO OUTSIDE!

*Friluftsliv* – Norwegian word (FREE loots liv) - means “Open air life”; incorporating nature into everyday life year round, for health and joy;

- Studies show even short amounts of time spend outdoors improve mood and mental/physical health
- When you get outside, you feel refreshed, robust and vital; in contact with elements; closer to God!

**Who does outdoor recreation in winter? What do you do?**

- Walking, snowshoeing; skiing; snowmobiling; Tailgate parties; bonfires; ice skating; ice fishing? Sledding? Building snow structures or ice sculpture? Anyone help with the ice castle? outdoor parties during quarantine?
- **“outdoorphins”** - a made up word for the happy hormones we get from being outdoors;
- **What are your favorite supplies for staying warm outside?**
  - long underwear!; hats and mitts, socks and hiking boots; handwarmer things; thermos for hot beverages;

B. **Going Indoors:**

- a. Danish concept of *Hygge* (HOOga) or (*Koselig* in Norwegian) (KOOsheleeg)
  - i. a quality of coziness and comfortable conviviality; a feeling of contentment or well-being; a feeling or atmosphere; happiness; escaping from seriousness;
  - ii. We get this with pillows, candles, fireplaces; blankets; board games; hot drinks; to create mood of comfort

**What do you look forward to doing at home in winter?**

- When I went to visit Cathy Palmer at her home, she had set outdoor chairs draped with blankets and offered a cup of tea; *koselig!*

III. What about winter in coronavirus – how has this winter been different?

- a. Do you think God made it milder as a blessing?
- b. Or is the lack of snow just making it worse?

IV. Whether indoors or outdoors, experts say having a positive mind set about winter makes us more satisfied with a winter lifestyle;

- a. Helena Roerdink is 102 or 103; she fell while getting her mail recently, and lay outside in the snow for 2 hours before someone found her. But now she’s doing physical therapy to feel stronger; walking laps with her walker and saying prayers every day! She stays positive!
- b. Instead of complaining, focus on what you love;

- i. Taking photographs of hoarfrost; moonlight;
- ii. Looking forward to new recipes, board games; letter writing, good books; bird feeders;
- iii. Cleaning the house; *koselig* goes better in an orderly house!

**What does God teach us in winter?**

- a. When winter is a blessing, we enjoy and cherish it; when it's difficult, we survive and learn from it. Either way, God gets us through it!

Listen to the words of this beautiful hymn, a poem by Longfellow: if you know it, be sure you're muted and sing along;

**Hymn:** "Tis Winter Now"

(Words: Samuel Longfellow; Tune: O Waly Waly)

Lori Hunter, Vocals and Piano

*'Tis winter now; the fallen snow  
has left the heavens all coldly clear;  
through leafless boughs the sharp winds blow,  
and all the earth lies dead and drear.*

*And yet God's love is not withdrawn;  
his life within the keen air breathes;  
his beauty paints the crimson dawn,  
and clothes each branch with glittering wreaths.*

*And though abroad the sharp winds blow,  
and skies are chill, and frosts are keen,  
home closer draws her circle now,  
and warmer glows her light within.*

*O God, you give the winter's cold,  
as well as summer's joyous rays,  
you warmly in your love enfold,  
and keep us through life's wintry days.*

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In preparation for Communion, it's customary to offer a prayer of Confession. This prayer seemed fitting for today, a confession for those times when we are feeling grief for everything our world is going through this winter...Listen...

**Pastoral Prayer:** *A Coronavirus Prayer for this Weary Winter*

(Jesuit prayer by Kerry Weber)

Jesus Christ, Light of the World,  
You understand what it is like to feel alone in the midst of great suffering.

Remain with us as we continue to endure the coronavirus pandemic.  
Awaken our hearts as we bear witness to the sickness, the sacrifice, even death.  
In these dark months we cry, "How long, O Lord?"  
Help us to watch and pray for signs of your hope.  
When we long for a world returned to normal, inspire us to work toward a world transformed.  
When we feel forgotten and lonely, help us to find solidarity through your love.  
When we cannot see your face, help us to see you in others, especially the essential workers,  
first responders and medical professionals who labor tirelessly.  
When we feel only sorrow in our souls,  
help us to know that the joy of the Gospel remains as true now as ever.  
When we feel only grief in our hearts, help us to find consolation in knowing that those who  
are sick or have died are held in your loving embrace.  
As we walk through this time of darkness,  
give us faith that we are headed toward brighter days.  
Give light to our eyes. Let us show that light to one another.  
Even in winter, when the ground appears barren, it is warmed by the light of your creation;  
seeds are nourished and green shoots are pushing up toward the sun.  
Jesus Christ, be our light.  
We pray through Christ, saying... **The Lord's Prayer**

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As we prepare for sharing Communion elements, get yourself some simple food; I'm using  
tea/hot chocolate and a cookie to go with our winter theme! Let's prepare our hearts with this  
beautiful hymn written during the Viet Nam war by a minister and his musician wife. It's about  
the aging of the year, but also about what happens to us as *we* grow older, and how we can  
"believe beyond believing".

**Music:** "Each Winter as the Year Grows Colder"  
*Each winter as the year grows older, We each grow older too.  
The chill sets in a little colder; The verities we knew  
Seem shaken and untrue.*

*When race and class cry out for treason, When sirens call for war,  
They overshout the voice of reason, And scream till we ignore  
All we held dear before.*

*Yet I believe beyond believing, That life can spring from death:  
That growth can flower from our grieving; That we can catch our breath  
And turn transfixed by faith.*

*So even as the sun is turning To journey to the north,  
The living flame, in secret burning, Can kindle on the earth  
And bring God's love to birth.*

*O Child of ecstasy and sorrows, O Prince of peace and pain,*

*Brighten today's world by tomorrow's, Renew our lives again;  
Lord Jesus, come and reign!*

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## **Service of Holy Communion**

### **Invitation:**

We believe that God created us, that Christ called us,  
and that the Holy Spirits sustain us on our journeys of faith.

Wherever you are on the path of salvation, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ,

Whether young or old, member, friend or visitor,

You are invited to this table, for Christ is our host.

In sharing the bread and cup, we find forgiveness and grace, the challenge to be faithful servants,  
the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out our mission, and eternal life.

### **Words of Institution:**

The story is told and we remember that on the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, he  
was at the Passover meal with his disciples. And at the meal, he took the bread and blessed it  
and broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Whenever you eat of  
it, do so in memory of me."

And on the same night, after supper, he took the cup and passed it to them saying, "This  
is the cup of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.  
Whenever you drink of it, do so in memory of me."

In sharing this meal, we remember Christ's life and teachings, his sacrifice and death, and  
we celebrate his resurrection. This is the feast of God for the people of God.

## **Sharing of the Bread and Cup**

**Mission Moment:** When we think about *koselig* or *hygga*, we tend to think of our own personal  
comforts. But your Women's Fellowship has also worked over the years to provide coziness for  
people who can't be in their own homes, either because of homelessness or domestic abuse, in  
nursing homes or hospitals. They have made lap blankets for these settings, and provided  
furnishings and comfort for a room at NATH (the homeless shelter in Rhineland). They have  
also provided mittens and hats for people who want to get outdoors and experience *Friluftsliv*  
(FREE loots liv).

Who can you think of that needs a little warmth and comfort this winter, and how can you  
help provide it?

Thank you, Women's Fellowship!

### **Benediction:** Prayer for Solstice (Patti Wigington)

*The sun returns! The light returns! The earth begins to warm once more!*

*The time of darkness has passed, and a path of light begins the new day.*

*Welcome, welcome, the heat of the sun, blessing us all with its rays."*

May God bless you with lengthening light!

May God warm your hearts in winter! Amen.

**Song:** "Let There Be Peace on Earth"