



### ***Exquisite Darkness: A Winter Solstice Meditation for Individuals***

Adapted for use as a meditation for individuals from the original *Exquisite Darkness: A Winter Solstice Liturgy*.

*The Winter Solstice marks the longest night of the calendar year. This meditation invites you individually into a time of rest and reflection that counters the frenetic pace of the secular Christmas season. It encourages you to experience the creative, natural cycle of light and darkness put forth to us as Christians in the Genesis creation stories.*

*The meditation begins by imagining it is dark and you are sitting outside near a fire. You are roasting marshmallows. The roasting of marshmallows symbolizes a transformation that can happen in front of your eyes—the fire is taking the marshmallow from one state to another.*

*There is a garden path that is lit with luminaries leading away from the fire. The path leads you by your garden that is now empty of its harvest and resting. A compost pile sits next to your garden.*

#### ***Read these words as you sit by this imaginary fire:***

For millennia, people have held festivities at this time of year to celebrate the end of the dark time and a return to the light. This reliable movement of the sun gave ancient peoples comfort as they went into the harsh winter, all the while anticipating and trusting that spring and the increase of light would emerge on schedule.

During Advent, we are called to settle into the exquisite darkness,

to hibernate, rest and restore.

This cycle was given to us at the time of Creation.

We are invited to face the darkness in our own lives  
and in the world around us.

The prophets assure us that the darkness will not overcome us.

They call us to watch for the light, notice the Light,  
and be warmed by its rays.

We are called to wait, to hope, to trust in promises made.

As we make this Advent journey,

we claim we come alive in both the light and the darkness.

*Visualize following the path lit by the luminaries through the darkness around you and into your heart and your spirit. As you walk along this path pause for a few moments of gentle deep breaths. Breathe out your worries and breathe in the peace of God. When you feel centered light or turn on a candle signifying that God is present.*

***Read the Scripture Genesis 1:14*** <sup>14</sup>

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.

*Pause to consider where you have experienced light and darkness during this season.*

***Read the Scripture Matthew 11:28-29*** <sup>28</sup>

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

*Imagine being "yoked" to Jesus. What does that yoke look and feel like?*

***Consider this:***

As we enter into this season of exquisite darkness, a time of hibernation for so many plants, trees, animals, what needs to settle and rest within you?

***Consider this:***

The compost pile by the garden path is a mound of soil that is teeming with little bugs and bacteria. When you look at the soil, it looks static as if nothing is happening. But those little bugs and bacteria are hard at work, almost invisible to the human eye, creating soil that will nourish and sustain new life when spring comes and more light is around us.

What needs some tender rest in your life? What needs to hibernate, what needs to be surrounded by exquisite darkness in order to be released, ride out the winter and maybe, in the spring with more light around us, come back to you in a new way?

*Take some time to consider the thoughts that have come to mind. You are yoked with Jesus. Decide what you will set aside for Jesus to attend to now as you rest and wait for more light when you can again pick up the load.*

*Read the following as a personal prayer pausing at the end of each sentence to consider how these changes would affect you.*

From the rising of the midwinter moon, may darkness and light dance together, O Shining One.

In this season, make me short on grumpy thoughts,  
long on sharing of words of gentleness.

Make me short on being rushed,  
long on attentiveness.

Make me short on seeing what's right before me/us,  
long on peering into the horizon.

Make me short on out-of-control to-do lists,  
long on savoring kindness.

Make me short on overlooking the dark sky,  
long on gazing at the twinkling stars.

Make me short on tradition as a habit,  
long on re-owning and re-creating.

Make me short on ignoring the hungry,  
long on making a delicious meal.

Make me short on rushing,  
long on wondering and pondering.

Make me short on walking past those sleeping in the cold,  
long on sharing blankets and hot tea.

Make me short on longing for what's next,  
and long on savoring the darkness.

*End this prayer with The Lord's Prayer either spoken or sung.*

***Lift up your eyes to the stars and close this meditation with these wishes:***

May the sun, moon and stars glow on me.

May I strive to rest and hibernate in exquisite darkness.

May I be yoked to Jesus for a new life through God's promise and find rest in my soul.

Amen.

***Continue to breathe deeply as you silently extinguish the candles and go forth.***

*Exquisite Darkness: Winter Solstice Service* was created by Ashley Goff (UCC), Minister for Spiritual Formation, and Rob Passow, Director of Music, at Church of the Pilgrims (PCUSA) in Washington, D.C. They created this liturgy for Church of the Pilgrims' first winter solstice service in 2012. Copyright 2013 Local Church Ministries, Faith Formation Ministry Team, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic many of us are by necessity alone. We have adapted the meaningful words of this liturgy to a mediation that someone can use on the Winter Solstice and/or throughout the dark days and nights of winter.