

Your Candle

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This might surprise you: as a child, I felt pretty ambivalent about church; until, I attended a candlelight Christmas Eve service. I couldn't believe that, I, a child, who is rarely trusted with anything delicate or dangerous, was handed my very own candle. When the light was passed to me, I remember the thrill of holding a flame for the first time, the warm glow of its light. Having a candle was a big responsibility for a small child. I stood as still as possible, trying to keep the flame away from the pew in front of me, and the hair of the person sitting in that pew! As we sang "Silent Night," I felt the warm wax drip on my fingers. In that moment, I felt so connected to each person around me, as we all held our candles, singing barely louder than a whisper. It was a holy moment.

Even in the years of my life when I did not attend church, I always returned for the Christmas Eve service. Once I got my license, I drove myself. Holding a candle, lighting it from the flame of an old friend or stranger, and singing what always felt more like a lullaby than a carol, I received what my spirit needed--every year. Sometimes, I my throat was so tight with emotion--with gratitude--with sorrow and with joy--that I could not sing. I would just hold my candle.

We say "Merry Christmas"--wishing each other a holiday of joy and happiness. But, this season is so much more than just joy and happiness. In my work as a hospital chaplain, I meet many people who aren't feeling very merry at all--with good reason. No matter what time of year it is, life goes on, and with it, we have moments of loss, change, and righteous anger.

In worship every week, we share our sorrows and our joys. We commit to being together, as we are, in all that we are feeling. Why should Christmas be any different?

My hope this year is that wherever you are on Christmas Eve, you can be exactly as you are, feel exactly what you feel. The candle you hold is YOURS--for whatever you need it to be. We share the flame, passing it around the room, but the candle is YOURS. As you look at the lights around you, may you remember that each of us holds our own candle--our own life we are living. Together, we make a beautiful light.