

December Theme

Hope: The Practice of Expectation

FOR MORE EXPLORATION

Books & Articles

- *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, by Rebecca Solnit
- *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, by Isabel Wilkerson
- 'The Place Beyond Fear and Hope', by Margaret Wheatley
<http://berkana.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/BeyondHopeandFear.pdf>
- 'We've Hoped Our Way Into Our Current Crisis', by Miguel Clark Mallet
<https://onbeing.org/blog/miguel-clark-mallet-weve-hoped-our-way-into-our-current-crisis/>

Music

- 'A Change is Gonna Come', by Sam Cooke
- 'Hey World (Don't Give Up)', by Michael Franti
- 'Solstice Night', by S.J. Tucker
- 'Within Our Darkest Night You Kindle a Fire that Never Dies Away', by Charles Pope

Videos

- The Hopeful Darkness of the Womb', Valerie Kaur at Watch Night service 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCenwgheIBs>
- Beyond Hope, Derrick Jensen on reaching beyond hope to commitment as relates to climate change
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58tWEaqZ-GM>

QUOTES FOR CONTEMPLATION

Critical thinking without hope is cynicism. Hope without critical thinking is naïveté. ~ *Maria Popava*

There is something compelling about the fact that Christmas comes, no matter what. The celebration of the birth of Jesus comes, no matter the season of your heart. The Prince of Peace, the baby that would bring a message of universal equality, compassion, forgiveness, and love is reborn again and again and again, no matter our state-of-mind or being...indeed, in spite of it. Perhaps that is the real miracle of the season, that hope and possibility cannot be denied. ~ *Cynthia Frado*

The future is dark. But my faith dares me to ask: What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? What if our America is not dead but a country still waiting to be born? What if the story of America is one long labor? What if all the mothers who came before us, who survived genocide and occupation, slavery and Jim Crow, racism and xenophobia and Islamophobia, political oppression and sexual assault, are standing behind

us now, whispering in our ear: You are brave? What if this is our Great Contraction before we birth a new future? Remember the wisdom of the midwife: "Breathe," she says. Then: "Push." ... ~ *Valarie Kaur, A Sikh Prayer for America*

Scratch a cynic and you will find a disappointed idealist. ~ *George Carlin*

Hope is a touch of graceful humor, no matter what's occurring. The ability to laugh, the ability to see the ridiculous, the ability not to tense up too much, when things become impossible, just to face them anyhow. A touch of humor. Let's say laughter through the flame... That's hope: Humor, guts, and courage, no matter the odds. ~ *Charles Bukowski*

You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming. ~ *Pablo Neruda*

The danger of hopelessness is that we can lose each other. In times of hopelessness, it's easy to get scared of everything and everyone. It's easy to start believing that your neighbor is the problem and that hoarding is a better strategy than



generosity. The problem is that when community starts to break down, we lose the most important source of hope we have: each other. ~ *Rev. Sean Parker Dennison*

Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting... [but it] is not the silencing and oppressive, "Wait," told to the activist, but rather the internal preparation of holding stillness and building strength before action. If we need to wait, let it be the waiting of a farmer who knows that deep below the earth, her seeds are sprouting their roots. Let it be the waiting of a musician, who knows to count to just the right moment to strike the bell. Let it be the waiting of self-care, knowing that one's body and spirit needs times of activity, and times of rest, in order to be effective. ~ *Rev. Christina Shu*





...hope doesn't just promise us that change will come in the future; it also changes who we are in the present.

What Does It Mean to Be a People of Hope?

Faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in [all of us]. Those who hope...can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. [True hope] means conflict with the world, for the good of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."

~ Jürgen Moltmann, Theologian

It's not always easy to hear well this time of year, especially when it comes to hope. The dominant messages are about hope offering us calm: "The light will come." "A new day is on its way." "Justice and joy are growing in the womb and will soon be born." Hope, from this point of view, is a voice that reassures. It's a welcomed whisper that says, "Yes, the sky may be dark now. Yes, the road you're on at this moment may be hard. But trust me, just over that horizon, there's a new world waiting for us all."

This soothing message comes to us as a gift. During dark days, we all get tired. The fruits of our efforts are hard to see. We feel alone. The promise that things will change offers us relief. We are released from the burden of believing that "it is all up to me" or that it all must be solved now.

It's a beautiful and needed message. But, as Moltmann and others remind us, it's also only half of what hope is trying to say. Hope doesn't just whisper "It *will* be different," it also shouts "It *should* be different" and "It *can* be different." Yes, it speaks soothing words about trusting and waiting, but it also takes the form of a holy impatience that declares, "Enough is enough. The time is now!" As Moltmann puts it, hope is not just that which calms the unquiet heart; it also *is* the unquiet heart.

In other words, hope doesn't just promise us that change will come in the future; it also changes who we are in the present. When we believe that a new day is dawning, we don't just sit down and wait. We get up and go out to meet the light. When hope convinces us that there are unseen forces working for the good, we begin to look around more closely, and in doing so we notice that darkness and pain are not all that is there. When hope's holy impatience gets into our bones, we start acting as if we deserve that new day now. Which in turn changes others by convincing them that we all have waited long enough.

Bottom line: listening fully to hope makes you dangerous, not just soothed! It doesn't relieve us of duty as much as it reminds us that wind is at our back and unseen reinforcements are at our side. Yes, hope reassures, but it also emboldens. It doesn't just offer us a promise; it gives us a push.

But all of this only happens if we listen fully. So maybe the most important question this month is: "Are we listening to everything hope has to say?"



Photo by Mike Wilson

KIDS' CORNER



LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

The Advent wreath is a traditional part of the celebration of Advent for many Christians. It originated in its Christian form in Germany (the practice of lighting candles in evergreen wreaths began in pagan cultures) and is a way to mark the exciting days leading up to Christmas. Four candles are lit around the wreath, one each Sunday of Advent, to represent the hope, love, joy, and peace of the season. Here are instructions for lighting your very own Advent wreath!

On Sunday, 12/3:

Light your first blue candle (HOPE) and say: "We light this candle of hope that we may give and receive hope in the coming year."

On Sunday, 12/10:

Light your first blue candle (HOPE) and your second blue candle (LOVE) and say: "We light this candle of love that we may give and receive love in the coming year."

On Sunday, 12/17:

Light your first blue candle (HOPE), your second blue candle (LOVE), and your pink candle (JOY) and say: "We light this candle of joy that we may give and receive joy in the coming year."

On Sunday, 12/24:

Light your first blue candle (HOPE), your second blue candle (LOVE), your pink candle (JOY), and your third blue candle (PEACE) and say: "We light this candle of peace that we may give and receive peace in the coming year."

Then light the white candle (BIRTH) and say: "May we never curse the darkness, but be a force to bring light into the world."

A WEEK'S WORTH OF HOPEFUL WORDS

Weave the following poems into your daily meditation, journaling or walking practice. Focus on a different one each day. Consider the practice of reading through the poem 2-3 times, choosing a different focus question for each reading. For instance, when reading through it the first time, simply ask yourself, "What line or phrase pops out for me?" On your second reading, ask yourself, "Who or what am I in the poem?" Other focus questions might be: "What is the poem asking me to do today?" or "Who is the poem asking me to engage in a new way?"



Here's the list of poems we recommend, but of course alter as needed:

MONDAY: Hope, by Lisel Mueller

<https://writersalmanac.org/episodes/20170404/>

TUESDAY: Sweet Darkness, by David Whyte

<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2014/04/17/sweet-darkness-by-david-whyte/>

WEDNESDAY: The Winter of Listening, by David Whyte

<https://www.facebook.com/PoetDavidWhyte/photos/a.213444315348246.68208.213407562018588/844107495615255/?type=3&theater>

THURSDAY: Hope, An Owner's Manual, by Barbara Kingsolver

Found [here](#) and <https://lifeacousticandamplified.wordpress.com/2014/03/19/hope-an-owners-manual-by-barbara-kingsolver/>

FRIDAY: Still the Moon Increases, by Nancy Shaffer

<https://simplyblessed.heartsdesire.com/2013/11/15/still-the-moon-increases/>

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of courage means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?

1. What if your darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but instead the darkness of the womb? What if this pain of yours is not about death and loss, but new life trying to be born? Could it be that Life - like any good midwife - is calling you to "breathe and push"? If so, in what way?
2. Who is hope for you? Whose way of being in the world helps you believe that tomorrow will be better? What are you doing to ensure that their inspiration remains front-and-center rather than faded and far away?
3. What might it mean for you to "be hope"? It's one thing to believe in hope; it's quite another to become it.
4. Are you bringing more hope into the world than you realize? Are you sure that your everyday commitments and work can't be seen as "bringing hope into the world"? If you don't think of your work and commitments in that way, how might life look different if you did?
5. Are you hopeless? Or have you let someone *take away* your hope? Have you allowed someone's betrayal to convince you that the world is darker than it really is?
6. Are you sure hope abandoned you? Or did your *preferred* dream just not occur? What if hope is waiting for you in a new and unexpected form?
7. Why are you keeping your hopes so small? Are you really going to let that past disappointment dictate the size of your dreams?
8. Are you calling yourself a cynic, but really a disappointed idealist underneath? Is your cynicism making you feel sane or suffocated?
9. Is hope trying to soothe your heart or disturb it? Is there a holy impatience inside you that is tired of waiting? Is hope itself telling you, "Stop hoping; Start acting, demanding, doing!"
10. Are you clear about the responsibility we have for our grandchildren's' hopes? What are you doing to foster them?
11. What if hope doesn't swoop in and wipe away all the pain? What if hope is you standing squarely inside the pain and saying to it, "You are not the full story"?
12. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

All contents adapted from
the Soul Matters Sharing
Circle resource materials
for December 2017.

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JUSTICE CORNER

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS FOR CIVIL
DISOBEDIENCE: PRACTICAL AND
LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIRECT
ACTION

December 13, 2017 at 6pm @ 2672 E. Alluvial Ave., Fresno, CA

Presented by NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD- CA
CENTRAL VALLEY
Mariah Thompson and Aldo S. Macedo

MUST RSVP to ccentralvalley.nlg.org

