

UUCMC Covenant Circle Session

December 2017: Hope

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

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

Reminder of our Covenant

Check-In (3-4 minutes each)

Topic with Readings

Hope

Lisel Mueller

Full poem found [here](#)

“...It is the singular gift
we cannot destroy in ourselves,
the argument that refutes death,
the genius that invents the future,
all we know of God.

It is the serum which makes us swear
not to betray one another;
it is in this poem, trying to speak.”

Hope begins in the dark, it's a stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work! - Anne Lamott

Hope has to be seen to be believed. It has to be made visible. It has to be something we can feel and touch. We are called to be persons who embody hope for one another. We have to be each other's partners in hope. - Paul Wadell, theologian

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

Hope is the salve that keeps our broken hearts soft. - Ann Voskamp

The Sun will rise and set regardless. What we choose to do with the light while it's here is up to us. Journey wisely. - Alexandra Elle

Hope also has something to do with presence -- not a future good outcome, but the immediate experience of being met, held in communion, by something intimately at hand.

- Cynthia Bourgeault

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

Sweet Darkness

David Whyte

Full poem found [here](#)

“When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.
When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.
Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.
There you can be sure
you are not beyond love...”

The Winter of Listening

David Whyte

Full poem found [here](#)

“...What disturbs
and then nourishes
has everything
we need...”

The day widened, pulled from both ends by the shrinking dark, as if darkness itself were a pair of hands and daylight a skein between them, a flexible membrane, and the hands that had pressed together all winter — praying, paralyzed with foreboding — now flung wide open. - Annie Dillard

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

Everyone has been hurt. Many people have been hurt so deeply that their scars are vivid reminders of visceral pain. Yet, not everyone walks around with a vocal and audacious negativity that can be harmful to others. What you're blaring to the world through a megaphone when you are openly and ceaselessly cynical is that you are fundamentally wounded; that you are so hurt, you still aren't capable of doing the work required to heal yourself. People don't naturally gravitate towards cynicism without some negative experience (or many) precipitating their response. So when you've been disappointed or hurt or let down, you use cynicism as a defense mechanism to protect yourself from being hurt again. The funny thing is, to anyone really listening, you're doing just that. - Serene Hitchcock, Cynicism Hides Hurt

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

For comfortably situated people, hopelessness means cynicism and letting oneself off the hook. If everything is doomed, then nothing is required.

Rebecca Solnit, The Case for Hope

Everything changes: there lies most of our hope and some of our fear.... If you take the long view, you'll see how startlingly, how unexpectedly but regularly things change. Not by magic, but by the incremental effect of countless acts of courage, love, and commitment, the small drops that wear away stones and carve new landscapes, and sometimes by torrents of popular will that change the world suddenly. To say that is not to say that it will all come out fine in the end regardless. I'm just telling you that everything is in motion, and sometimes we are ourselves that movement. - Rebecca Solnit, The Case for Hope

Despair is often premature: it's a form of impatience as well as certainty. My favorite comment about political change comes from Zhou En-Lai, the premier of the People's Republic of China under Chairman Mao. Asked in the early 1970s about his opinion of the French Revolution, he reportedly answered, "Too soon to tell." - Rebecca Solnit, The Case for 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 goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present." - Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope

The message of the Incarnation is not to behold an innocent baby resplendent in inertia, but rather to take sides with a God who agitates for reform and shatters the status quo. - Doris Donnelly

Change and hope come from the margins. - Krista Tippett

What is Hope?

Rubem A. Alves, Brazilian liberation theologian

Full poem found here: <http://mpleroy-eng.blogspot.com/2004/10/rubem-alves-full-poem.html>

“It is a presentiment that imagination is more real and reality less real than it looks.
It is a hunch
that the overwhelming brutality of facts
that oppress and repress is not the last word.
It is a suspicion
that reality is more complex
than realism wants us to believe
and that the frontiers of the possible
are not determined by the limits of the actual...”

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory. - Howard Zinn

Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the good. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.- Theodore Parker

Hope comes from looking back and knowing we are on that arc... Hope comes from looking forward and knowing can we harness the collective power of [the community around us]... Hope comes from looking [deeply] and knowing we can change, and grow. - Rev. Jay Wolin

“We are not saints, we are not heroes. Our lives are lived in the quiet corners of the ordinary. We build tiny hearth fires, sometimes barely strong enough to give off warmth. But to the person lost in the darkness, our tiny flame may be the road to safety, the path to salvation. It is not given us to know who is lost in the darkness that surrounds us or even if our light is seen. We can only know that against even the smallest of lights, darkness cannot stand. A sailor lost at sea can be guided home by a single candle. A person lost in a wood can be led to safety by a flickering flame. It is not an issue of quality or intensity or purity. It is simply an issue of the presence of light.” - Kent Nerburn

“Agent Smith: “Why, Mr. Anderson? Why do you do it? Why get up? Why keep fighting? Do you believe you're fighting for something? For more than your survival? Can you tell me what it is? Do you even know? Is it freedom? Or truth? Perhaps peace? Could it be for love? Illusions, Mr. Anderson. Vagaries of perception. The temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose. And all of them as artificial as the Matrix itself. Although, only a human mind could invent something as insipid as

love. You must be able to see it, Mr. Anderson. You must know it by now. You can't win. It's pointless to keep fighting. Why, Mr. Anderson, Why? Why do you persist? “
Neo (“Mr. Anderson”): “Because I choose to.”

- From the movie, Matrix Revolutions

Don't think that your hopes are too audacious. God's hopes for the world are even more audacious than you can imagine. Mary thought it audacious that God should choose her to carry God's hope for the world, but it was true. The same is true of us. - Steve Garnaas-Holmes, unfolding light

Hope opens us to the future but releases us into the present. Advent draws our eyes toward the horizon as we watch and wait for the Christ who comes to us... Instead of luring us away from the present, however, Advent invites us more deeply into it, where the kingdom of God is at work even now. This is the nature of the hope that Advent cultivates in us. Rich with memory and infused with expectation, hope calls and enables us to work here and now, in company with the [Sacred that] is already about the work of heaven in our midst. - Jan Richardson, from Circle of Grace

Advent is a season that seeks to build a world fit for the arrival of a child. - Rev. Dwight Welch

The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God's [back] fade in the distance. So stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon.

- Jan L. Richardson, Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas

Advent: the time to listen for footsteps – you can't hear footsteps when you're running yourself.

- Bill McKibben

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

I still value hope, but I see it as only part of what's required, a starting point. Think of it as the match but not the tinder or the blaze. To matter, to change the world, you also need devotion and will and you need to act. Hope is only where it begins. - Rebecca Solnit, from The Case for Hope

Silent Reflection

Questions to prompt discussion (choose ones that work for you)

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

1. Tell a story of hope in your life.
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 sooth 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?
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.

Housekeeping Details How goes your service project plans? Do you need ideas? Lisa, Michelle or Virginia are happy to help!

Check-out

Closing Words

Despair is anger with no place to go. Hope is the feeling we have that the feeling we have is not permanent. - Mignon McLaughlin