

Please pray with me and for me that all the God of Hope wishes to express in us today is called forth in my words and in my heart.

Meditation

Come into these moments of quiet, just as they are. Shift or wiggle to let any places where your body may be holding tension to soften and settle in. Notice the vibrations of those situations you called to mind earlier that cry out for transformation... and simply breathe...

Feel yourself supported, noticing how the back of your body touches where you sit. Sense your feet resting on the floor beneath you, and let your hands rest comfortably by your side or on your lap.

You may want to close your eyes, or simply let your gaze soften and drop, or focus on the light of the candle. Notice the sensation of your breath in, and out, and where your body moves gently as you inhale and exhale.

- Call to mind again one of the situations in your own life, or in the larger world that cries out for transformation, see its reality and fully accept WHAT IS and picture you are holding it gently in your left hand
- Now feel the deep, beautiful paradox that you are both a unique, unrepeatable expression of the Source AND there is NO separation from Spirit or others in the field of Love welcome in WHAT CAN BE, and hold that in your right hand
- Bring your awareness to your left hand as you breathe in and out. Bless the chaos, bless the brokenness, bless the unfinished, bless the sorrow, bless that which is...
- Bring your awareness to your right hand as you continue gently breathing in and out. Bless the healing though you cannot see how, bless the mystery, bless your yes, bless possibility, bless the transformation
- Bring your hands together in prayer position, laying down *all that is and all that will be* at the altar of Love

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ~Romans 15:13

Taking a deeper breath or two, come back gently to the room...

Message: Cultivating Hope and Faith

In this season of Advent, nature herself teaches us about darkness and light– the shorter days and longer nights in our part of the world are not just something to “get through” (although...:-D) Last week when Zelda spoke to us about “cultivating” the soil of our awareness– through curiosity, through seeing our ego as “innocent and an ally.” The wisdom of the Three Sisters– the collector spirit of corn, the receiver spirit of beans, and the greeter spirit of squash– is birthed in the wisdom of nature’s rhythms. There is no blooming of spring, growth of summer or harvest of autumn without the deep underground rest of seeds and roots in the dark of winter. Hope, faith and trust are interwoven in those roots.

Optimism is an ability to visualize a positive outcome in the future– and that can be a building block of hope. But hope, unlike optimism, does not rely on an *outcome we can visualize or see*. As Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, “Hope is a trust in what God has done and will do, in spite of evidence to the contrary. Hope in gospel faith is not just a vague feeling that things will work out, for it is evident that things will not just work out. **Rather, hope is the conviction, against a great deal of data, that God is tenacious and persistent in overcoming the deathliness of the world, that God intends joy and peace.**”

I read that this week as I thought about what could I say to us about hope and faith when there is so much evidence “that things will not just work out.”

- Breakfast program and Food Pantry record numbers of families served at FOCUS and St. Vincents
- Our collective cultural addiction to noise, to numbing, to an inability to hold paradox and nuance
- The untold numbers of lives destroyed by rampant power-over, violence, greed, tyranny, racism, war

“...hope is the conviction, *against a great deal of data*, that God is tenacious and persistent in overcoming the deathliness of the world, that God intends joy and peace.”

So how do we cultivate the hope and faith that God intends joy and peace? In conversation with the lines from Walter Brueggemann is a passage I often turn to (and have a on my mirror in my bedroom) from ***Becoming Wise: An Inquiry Into the Mystery and Art of Living*** by Krista Tippett in the chapter titled “Hope Reimagined”:

*Hope is distinct... from optimism or idealism. It has nothing to do with wishing. It references reality at every turn and reveres truth. It lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven [inescapably]...into the light of life and sometimes seems to overcome it. **Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory.** It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be.”*

Hope *pulls us* into the present moment AS IT IS. When my mind is spinning stories of worry-- or even happy anticipation-- about the future, and about events that I don't actually control, hope reminds me to come back to the here and now. Hope asks me again and again to trust-- to trust the unfolding, to trust the absolute, ever-present goodness of God alive in every moment. To trust, despite evidence to the contrary that God intends joy and peace.

Hope lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven [inescapably] into the light...” Where optimism may veer into wishful thinking, Hope calls us to remain clear eyed and unflinching as we recognize the shadow in ourselves, and in our collective experience-- and yet still have faith in the **ultimate** goodness that continuously calls us to shine the light of Love into the darkness. There is nothing we experience in our life situation that can't be used by God. And God IN us, works all things for the good-- through us and as us.

In my own twisting, meandering life-path, I can look back and see how transformation of new growth was often nurtured in gifts of unexpected blessings that grew out of dark times. There were moments on my journey when I could stay curious, open, and have faith in the unseen, unfolding outcomes. And there have been plenty of times when my ego did not feel like an ally helping me step into a hope-filled partnership with God.

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The paradox is that our clear-eyed hope— hope as a muscle, hope as a choice and a practice— then also gives us courage to act. Hope becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hope gives us the faith, courage and strength to live in partnership with our Divine call to BE love in action, to speak our truth with clarity and compassion; to feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted, clothe the naked. To bring healing— as Jesus did— NOW, in this moment, not in some far off imagined time of glory. As always, I know I MUST practice in my own way, nurturing those seeds of hope— it’s an inside job of cultivating my power of stillness, of listening, of being present. AND it is only possible for me to cultivate my soul in the company of my beloved community.

This seasonal rhythm of dark days that will soon circle back—as they ALWAYS do— to longer days of sunlight asks us to listen to the wisdom of nature, to the wisdom of a *rhythm of being* that is as old as creation. This small steady flame Mary lit earlier reminds us that bold hope, vigorous hope is a gift of Spirit. This gift is ours—available in every moment, no matter how dark— and is the soil that cultivates our deep faith in the ever-present goodness of God at work in us, through us and as us. With hope, we cultivate compassion. With hope, we work for justice and mercy. With hope, we bear God’s peace and light to the world.

Hope by Rev Steve Garnaas-Holmes

*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.*

—Hebrews 11.1

Hope is not optimism, not wishing,
not a bet on the future,
but trust in what is already present, unseen.
I hope in the sunrise because the earth is already turning.
My faith is not that God will intervene
and make things better or fix problems;
my faith is that love is at work.
I trust in hidden love even as injustice runs loose.
I believe in our Oneness even as war and racism wound us.
I know our Belovedness even as we assault each other.
Even though we damage the earth,
though the violent rage and the rich oppress the poor,
still this world is born of Goodness,
and grace flourishes even in bad places,
and Love holds us in aching but untiring arms.
Even when the way is not well lit, I live in hope.

I abound in the divine power of hope, and am filled with joy and peace. And so it is. Amen