

## How Will We Co-Create Hope?

Beloved friends, as we cross a threshold into a new church year today on this first Sunday in Advent, we are invited to wonder: how will we co-create hope? I begin with quotations from two very different sources.

South African Anglican Archbishop and theologian Desmond Tutu, known for his work as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist, died nearly 1 year ago. Tutu wrote, *“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”*

In spring of 2022, someone simply called Matthew posted this now viral tweet about hope: *“People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider's webs. It's not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go.”*

In asking how we will co-create hope, we are opening ourselves to acting as agents in building hope. Without commitment like Tutu to envisioning and the woman to pursuing our hopes, they become merely wishes, which are a bit on the ephemeral side.

Let us pray. Spirit of God, you have gathered us today in our beloved church building, built by our ancestors in faith on land that has been in relationship with the Dakota and other indigenous peoples for millennia. As you gather us to build our hope, grant us serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

As Mindy shared in the introduction to our reading of Psalm 122, it is very much about a climb - climbing toward God's reign of peace and justice. And so I would like to review a few passages from the psalm and invite us to wonder further. We heard, “And now our feet are standing within your gates, Jerusalem.” This, friends, is about arriving to a threshold. What is the most important threshold in your life right now. And are you fully aware that you are standing at its gates.

We heard, *“Pray for peace within Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you prosper! May peace be in your walls!’”*

For whom do you long for prosperity? I wonder if it is for yourself in some aspect of your life that you long to witness prosperity? Do you long for prosperity for a loved one, a little-bit known neighbor, or for the people you can imagine in situations far away? Where do you long for prosperity with the psalmist?

And finally, from the Psalm, we also heard, *“For the sake of my family and friends, I say, ‘Peace be within you!’ For the sake of our God, I will seek your good.”* As you look around this space – this community of people, and as you look around your life, for whom and with whom will you seek their good? How might we be inspired? That is yet another kind of threshold to be ready to actively see the good for another.

As Mindy shared in the introduction to our reading from Isaiah, the people of ancient Israel felt God very present with them - a presence woven into the fabric of their identity as a people and felt especially powerfully in the space of the Temple, which is today the Temple Mount.

We benefit from a sense of God’s very presence with us in our Sanctuary of our church building as well. Let’s hear a few pieces from the reading from Isaiah again. We heard, *“Many people will come and say: “Come, let us climb God’s mountain to the Temple of the God of Jacob, that we may be instructed in God’s ways and walk in God’s paths.”* What specific climb do you need to make in your calling to co-create hope? Toward where do you need to climb to reach a bit further?

We also heard, *“O house of Leah and Rachel and Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of God!”* What a beautiful we do arrive to in Advent and toward Christmastide. Every week, more light will be added to our Sanctuary space even as move toward the darkness of the longest night of the year. Where are your spaces of light for your walk toward love and justice? Let us call to mind today with gratitude where we are really sourced with the light of even our Advent themes – the light of hope, the light of peace and joy and love.

My favorite words about hope (which I shared last year as well) come from author Barbara Kingsolver. As a teenager, I read the book *Animal Dreams*, in which she writes:

*“The very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.”*

Hope enlivens us to imagine how we will move, participate, live into what is coming next. At this time, I want to invite you to pull out an insert at the very back of your bulletin. It is entitled, “Co-Creating Hope.” For those who are with us at a distance, I want to share that the prompts are:

- Hopes I have for myself for the coming year. I hope...
- Hopes I have for our congregation for the coming year, I hope:
- Who or what are the “two-by-fours” strengthening the walls that hold up or support my “roof” of hope?

As so we are going to invite ourselves now as Sharon plays for an extended moment (it will be a couple of minutes) to fill in some real concrete ideas of our own hopes. This will be an opportunity for spiritual practice for ourselves and then we will be welcome if anyone wants to raise a word or phrase from their page as we return from this meditative time. Please plan as we pass our offering plates for the first time in a long time to fold and place this in the offering plate later. You may wish to take a photo of it for yourself or keep it and share a photo with me. I would love to hold confidentially the hopes that you share. Let us be in a time of meditation. *[meditative music]*

That may be hardly enough time. So you will be able to continue that. Would anyone or few people like to rise and say a word or phrase that is a hope for themselves that they feel vulnerable to speak in a word or phrase? How about that next question: would anyone like to speak a hope they have for our congregation? *[Fill our pews. To accept and celebrate differences, to work together joyfully.]* Would anyone like to share an ‘aha!’ about what any of the two-by-fours are in your life, holding up your walls that sustain your roof of hope. *[Watching the actual construction of a skating park for neighborhood children with two-by-twelves.]* Any other reflections to state out loud – a word of hope?

Friends, I am glad that we are taking this time for ourselves, to look into our own lives. And please do place that in the offering plate later and keep an image for yourself (or send me an image if you like).

Let us close with these words again with which we opened. From the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu: *"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."*

And from Matthew, the tweeter: *"People speak of hope as if it is this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider's webs. It's not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go."*

Friends, we are hard-working, big-hearted people. Let us move into this new church year to pursue even greater love and justice... because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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Psalm 122, Isaiah 2: 1-5