



SALT & LIGHT

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OUR FAITH

Hope Church is called by God and equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the unity, reconciliation and justice given in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. These touchstones drawn from the Belhar Confession give voice to the historic Christian faith in our time and place.

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EDITORIAL & DESIGN

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Seeking What's Fruitful for Our Life Together

By Pastor Gordon Wiersma

One of the things we as congregational leaders asked ourselves shortly into this season of disruption from the Covid-19 pandemic was, "Is it helpful to still publish a Hope Church newsletter?" And with the June edition of *Salt & Light*, there was a resounding answer of YES to that. The newsletter provided rich content for our hearts and minds, and it provided another connection of God's grace and strength among us. And you'll find more of that rich resource in this edition of *Salt & Light*.

An additional question we are seeking to answer in this coming fall season is, "Is it helpful to start moving back toward some program options for Hope Church to participate in?" Hope Church leadership has focused in recent months on core identities of worship, care, and service, and we have heard from you a resonance with and strength received from that focus. And although the rhythms of this time in our world are very different, the more familiar rhythm of summer into fall does bring us to a season in which to turn toward some additional program offerings. Already this past spring and summer, we've navigated connecting for study and support, for youth groups, and for community advocacy. With the fall, we can explore some additional ways for connection. The details of these programs will come through email, Facebook, and mail, but these are the opportunities we are developing:

- Bi-weekly Early Worship starting in September
- Regular Adult Education offerings in September
- A Wednesday evening series in October focused on issues of racial justice
- A parenting discussion group centered on themes of raising children in the midst of the realities of racial identity and racism in our culture

We feel that we have a better sense of the technology and logistics needed to delve into these new opportunities, and we trust that it will be workable for all who wish to be able to participate. As we do so, you can see that we are seeking to be relevant to the calls for justice that the Spirit is bringing to light around us, while seeking to be grounded in the worship and nurture that deepens our faith and our reliance on the gifts of the Spirit among us.

We'll see how it goes. These offerings are not meant to add busyness just for the sake of it—as there continues to be so much for us all to tend to on so many levels for ourselves and our world during these challenging times. Rather this is done with a sense of timeliness and gratitude, trusting that we can together sort through what is needed and fruitful for our life as a community of faith in Christ.

Peace - Pastor Gordon



Youth Group: Memories and Meaning

By Pastor Beth Carroll

Necessity truly is the mother of invention. Hope Church youth have had just as much change in their lives as any adults, and they amaze with their ability to roll with the punches and make the best of not being able to be with their communities. Like most organizations, our youth programming was drastically changed in response to the quarantine. For the spring and first part of the summer, High Hopes and Fish Club discontinued in-person meetings. Instead, we moved our meetings to Zoom. The goals of our time “together” were to give them space to process aloud how all of the change has been going for them, to share a devotional together, to pray, and even to play a game each meeting, including a scavenger hunt.

The biggest challenge was what to do in lieu of our service and hiking trips; cancelling them both was such a disappointment. However, Fish Club and High Hopes decided to give a local “service trip” a go. We helped three organizations with projects. We organized Personal Protection Equipment kits for Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates to distribute to area migrant workers. (Thanks for your donations, Hope Church members!) Then, we weeded the memorial garden at Hope Church and cleared Buckthorn, an invasive species, at Riley Trails. We were busy that week, but we still made room for a frozen yogurt trip, a game of Hide and Seek at Centennial Park, and even fun with water balloons and Super Soakers in the Hope Church parking lot! This summer was not what we planned, but it was still memorable, meaningful, and fun.



Children's Ministry: A Time Like No Other

By Jocelyn Van Heest, Children's Ministry Director

So many things have changed in many aspects of our lives, affecting how we act: masks, sanitizers, physical distancing, learning new technologies. Who could have imagined all of these changes? What hasn't changed is our commitment and concern for the children of Hope Church. The overarching goal is to build and maintain connection. We explored many possibilities, with the result of varied opportunities offered for our children.

During Lent, the children know that the Church Year Circle emphasizes special worship experiences. There were weekly video presentations of the Children in Worship stories, wondering time, and weekly communication with the families that included response ideas for each story. Before Holy Week we delivered Resurrection Eggs sets for both older and younger children. Following the Hope Church tradition of "putting away" a special chosen word during Lent, the children

received envelopes containing cards to be opened on Easter that revealed the special chosen word: ALLELUIA.

At Pentecost, Pastor Gordon and I personally delivered pinwheels and a special seasonal prayer to each family. We both enjoyed that small, in-person/physically-distanced interaction with some of the families. Some of you may have heard those items spoken about during the Word with the Children during the service as the pastors have connected some of the children's activities.

In the summer, the theme was "God's Family in ACTION!" The children received video lessons from the book of Acts and stories of Paul. These videos were supplemented by at-home kits containing art supplies, lyrics, special surprises, and other activities. The families were invited to create a family crest showing their own responses in the ways each family is a part of God's family. This summer the

children are also enjoying the gift of receiving personalized cards and letters the old-fashioned way—courtesy of the U.S. mail. In addition, parents receive weekly emails with attached children's worship bulletins and devotional resources.

Going forward, we are dedicated to meeting the goal of keeping the children connected in some old and new ways. As throughout this process, many ideas are being discussed and developed in response to the ever-changing patterns of the lives of the children and their families. We are excited about the experiences we have shared and the opportunities for the future.

We appreciate the contribution of parents, which is necessary and vital for the success of this shared approach to the faith development of the children.

THINKING OF YOU • COLOR & SHARE

Physical distancing is hard, isn't it? We don't get to see our friends, our grandparents, our extended family. When you miss your friends from school, your church friends, and your work friends, what ways do you let them know you're thinking of them during this challenging COVID-19 time?

One way you can let them know is by using this "Thinking of You" coloring page (adapted from one of our digital greeting cards). Print this sheet and color and cut out the "Thinking of You" coloring page below. Then take a picture of it and text it to a friend, or email it, or share it on social media. Maybe you could send one to a school teacher, or a Sunday School teacher, and let them know you are thinking of them. Or maybe your piano teacher. Or your grandparents, or other significant grown-ups in your life. However you use it, we hope you enjoy bringing some color and hope into someone's day.



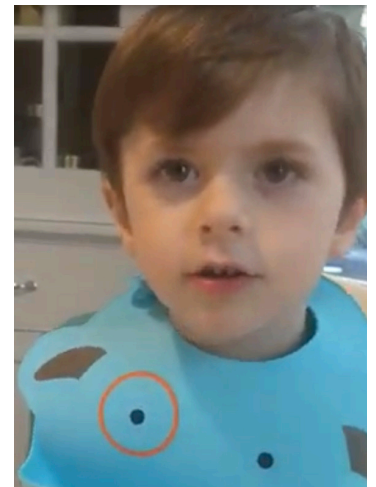
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Pictures from Hope Church Children

By Pastors Jill Russell, Beth Carroll, and Gordon Wiersma

When the pandemic first hit, we as pastors scrambled for ways to stay connected to our members, including our youngest. One of our favorite ways to stay connected to Hope Church children has been to ask them to send us pictures of themselves engaged in some part of their life or to share a picture or drawing they have made. Each of the pastors shared a children's sermon that invited the children to engage with us in

this way. Receiving those emails and pictures was and is a great gift. One such invitation around Eastertime was for children to send a picture of themselves at their Easter brunch or engaging in an activity that they love that makes them want to sing "Allelulia!" We thought we would share a few of these (with the permission of their parents, of course!) with all of you.





Listening to Live Music in 2020

By Rhonda Edgington, Hope Church Associate Director of Music & Organist

A number of you tuned in to my livestream organ concert in July; thanks for so many supportive comments and emails! Considering all the appreciation we've heard for that event, I've been brainstorming other new ways we can share and enjoy live music while keeping everyone safe. This is just a "teaser": more information will be forthcoming as we make plans and figure out details for each of these ideas:

1. **Future livestream concerts:** I will definitely try another one of these concerts—and I might even visit other area churches for livestreams on different organs, as well!
2. **Advent hymn sing:** In lieu of my annual Advent organ concert, this year I'd like to offer an Advent/Christmas hymn sing of sorts. I'll play, and you all sing your hearts out—at home. I hope we can have one or two singers at church with me, leading the singing. Perhaps we can even take requests beforehand!

3. **Advent music and poetry:** Laurie Baron and I are dreaming up some kind of meditative evening of texts and corresponding music paired around themes of the season.

4. **One-on-one mini organ concerts:** This was inspired by a New York Times article about how German orchestral musicians continued performing music for the public during lockdown: "[Musicians Playing Through the Lockdown, to One Listener at a Time](#)." This would be a chance to sign up for your own individual time slot to be present in the Hope Church sanctuary with the sounds of the pipe organ surrounding you. I'll have some daytime slots—about ten minutes per person—as well as evenings and weekends. As with the hymn sing, there may even be a chance to request beforehand a favorite piece of yours!

Look for more information coming in September.

Vision 2020 for the RCA

By Jim Brownson

I've been asked to write a summary of [the 2020 Vision Team report](#), which is online on the RCA's website. Writing a summary is a complex task: there are many different views within the denomination, including a variety represented on the Vision Team, and they disagree. Moreover, this year's General Synod was cancelled due to COVID-19 problems, further complicating the picture, and there are churches that were already, even before the report came out, talking about leaving the denomination. Finally, there is lots of further work still underway in various parts of the church, and it is unclear how all that will turn out. So take all this with several grains of salt!

The most important issue is the reorganization option, but there is also some controversy here. Last year, many members of the 2019 General Synod voiced significant doubts about reorganizing, because they believed it would divide too many churches. There are very few churches of one mind on these issues in the RCA, particularly around sexuality. As a result, this reorganization option may be unworkable and may simply cause further division of individual churches. I have significant doubts about whether it will be passed, given the 2019 controversy. The proposal also has the net effect of completely abandoning the geographic basis of assemblies in the RCA, something to which I and others have previously objected. Finally, there is a future dimension we need to take seriously: Do we really intend to allow classes to form for whatever reason they choose in the future? Once the sexuality problem is past, and geography is

eliminated as a criterion, we may create further unanticipated problems down the road.

A second major issue focuses on the creation of a new independent body overseeing RCA mission. What is left unclear is the relationship between this body and the assemblies of the RCA, as well as oversight more generally. Funding is a particular problem, as well as policy. It is one thing for churches to support their own missionaries through such a strategy; it is quite another to develop comprehensive plans for mission work through such an agency. I note that a minority of the committee objects to this as well. I worry that this puts mission in the RCA to a slow death.

The generous departure proposal sounds fine, and I don't have any major issues here. If an entire classis or region wants to depart, though, there will be no one to handle the final issues, and that's a problem. It just seems reasonable to find a way to allow a classis or region to act corporately on this issue if there is unanimity within the body, which is not addressed in the report.

Interestingly, the RCA has a long history of forming committees to do particular work and then ignoring their reports. I see a strong likelihood that this proposal may suffer the same fate. I'm not going to get too worried yet, but who knows? Other problems may arise.

Better Stewardship of Our Landscape

Our own Lisa Denison loves all things natural, which led her to launch a consulting service in sustainable practices. She's also a big fan of local businesses. You can learn more at www.flowercoach.com. Here she interviews Steve Veldheer of Good Sweet Earth, an organic yard care company.

Lisa: Steve, you've been caring for my lawn and garden now for three years. How did you get started?

Steve: My wife Corey and I started as a vermicomposting (composting with worms) company in 2012. We now produce thousands of pounds of worm compost and a microbial drench for lawns and gardens called worm tea. Later we expanded into helping homeowners, gardeners, and small farms create healthier soil with organic fertilization.

Lisa: Can a lawn be environmentally responsible and decent looking? Any tips?

Steve: The answer is yes. First, use the highest setting on your mower to grow a thicker, healthier turf. Short grass has short roots. Shallow roots struggle to find water. So, in hot dry midsummer your lawn's going to look terrible.

Second, leave grass clippings and mulched leaves to feed the soil. Clippings provide organic matter and nutrients. Bagged clippings remove God's free fertilizer.

Lisa: What's the right way to water a lawn?

Steve: Michigan has cool weather turf, which is naturally green in spring and fall. In summer heat it's supposed to go dormant and get brown. If you're comfortable with that, don't water, and it'll get the rest and carbohydrates it needs for a vibrant fall.

If you don't want to have crispy brown grass in July and August, water just enough to keep it green. Here's the key: Water less frequently, but longer. Instead of 15 minutes every day, water 45 to 60 minutes once or twice a week and only when the turf looks too crispy—but water deeply. Water deep in the soil forces the roots to go deep. Soil with a lot of organic matter retains water, and lawns stay greener longer, even at higher temperatures.

Lisa: Is aerating a lawn necessary?

Steve: Definitely aerate in the fall if your soil seems compacted and grass is having difficulty

growing. Aeration is all about getting air into the soil. Healthy soil is 25 percent air! That being said, aeration has only been around since the advent of chemical fertilizers and herbicides. Chemicals kill the life in your soil—fungi, bacteria, worms and beetles—all the natural systems that convert plant matter into compost. If you've got life in your soil and a steady supply of organic material, those little critters will be active and aerate the soil for you.

Lisa: So what does my lawn need this fall?

Steve: Fall is a great time to get ready for next year. The two most important things are overseeding and putting down organic fertilizer or compost. Overseeding thickens turf; filling in gaps denies weeds the opportunity to grow. Organic fertilizer or compost will add organic matter; soil won't be able to hold nutrients or water without it.

Lisa: You mentioned leaves earlier. Any time-saving advice?

Steve: Definitely mulch mow those leaves! That's free fertilizer. If you have a lot of leaves, you may want to rake some up before mulching—you don't want to smother the turf. Those tiny leaf particles do three things: turn into compost for the soil, release nutrients, and serve as somewhat of a blanket for your grass to protect it over the harsh winter. [Lisa adds that mulched leaves also make good mulch for your flower garden.]



A sustainably managed lawn is pet and people friendly

Resources for Anti-Racism Work and Racial Equity

By the Reconciliation Ministry

Striving toward the goal of racial equity and evolution towards anti-racism, we at Hope Church seek education, information, and inspiration by asking “What do you recommend?” Our faith group of readers, learners, and activists turned to the Reconciliation Ministry with the task of curating a list of contemporary books, podcasts, and videos, which quickly generated a lengthy list.

Where does one start to meaningfully organize this list? Conduct an internet search, of course! After just a few minutes, one article repeatedly rose to the top. Reading it, I wondered if this task was all for naught.

Dr. Lauren Michele Jackson teaches in the Departments of English and African American Studies at Northwestern University. Jackson’s article [What Is an Anti-Racist Reading List for?](#) was published June 4, 2020, in *Vulture*, a component of *New York Magazine*. (NOTE: A version of this article is also available in the June 8, 2020, issue for those who subscribe to the *New York Magazine*.) References to her work continued to appear in others’ articles and subsequent interviews, such

as the NPR podcast [The limitations of an anti-racist reading list](#). Jackson’s piece challenges us to consider what we are doing. I would like to think that we at Hope strive to continue our work, as she states we must “get down to the business of reading.” Thus, we want to generate a list. But Jackson warns not to place all black authors into one category under the anti-racist heading and acknowledges the flaws in organizing a list where “Aside from the contemporary teaching texts, genre appears indiscriminately: essays slide against memoir and folklore, poetry squeezed on either side by sociological tomes.” She asserts we should read Toni Morrison’s work as novels, because she is a great novelist. Read *The Warmth of Other Suns* for its historical value. Read works on race, power, and capital.

Review the nonfiction and fiction list below of books (memoirs with essays) and explore the additional resources at the bottom to find more. Also included are resources for children’s titles. At the very bottom are some podcasts that have also been highly recommended.

Nonfiction

- Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?*
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*
- Carol Anderson, *White Rage, The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*
- Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
- Mahzarin R. Banaji, Anthony G. Greenwald, Eric Martin, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*
- Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?*
- Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*
- Austin Channing Brown, *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*
- Aaron Dixon, *My People are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Party Captain*
- Robin DiAngelo and M.E. Dyson, *White Fragility*
- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*
- Lenny Duncan, *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US*
- Michael Eric Dyson, *Tears We Cannot Stop*
- Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*
- Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*
- Cathy Parks Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*
- Mira Jacob, *Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations*
- Tiffany Jewell, *This Book Is Anti-Racist*
- Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be an Antiracist*
- Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bendele, *When They Call You a Terrorist*
- Ruth King, *Mindful of Race*
- Wesley Lowery, *They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement*

- Ijeoma Olue, *So You Want to Talk about Race*
- Paul Ortiz, *An African-American and Latinx History of the United States*
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*
- Jason Reynolds, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*
- Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*
- Layla Saad, *Me and White Supremacy*
- Annaka Sikkink, *The Education of a Novice Ally: Learning to be a Middle Class Ally in the Work to End Poverty*
- Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy*
- Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*
- Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin*
- Jesmyn Ward, *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race*
- Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*
- Damon Young, *What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Blacker*

Fiction

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*
- James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Water Dancer*
- Esi Edugyan, *Washington Black*
- Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*
- Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*
- Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys* and *The Underground Railroad*
- Jacqueline Wood, *Brown Girls Dreaming*

General Resources

- wisdomofthewounded.com/2020/06/29/a-starting-point-for-racial-justice-stop-look-listen/
- www.booktable.net/black-lives-matter-reading-list
- nymag.com/strategist/article/anti-racist-reading-list.html
- chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/204842963/1357692923
- wbur.org/artery/2020/06/17/reading-list-on-race-for-allies
- bookpeople.com/anti-racist-reading-list
- napabookmine.com/antiracist-reading-list
- openculture.com/2020/06/an-anti-racist-reading-list.html

Young Adult and Children's Reading

- diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/
- readacrossamerica.org/recommended-books/
- adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature
- theeverymom.com/diverse-childrens-books/
- pbs.org/parents/thrive/childrens-books-about-race-and-diversity
- hereweeread.com/2019/11/the-2020-ultimate-list-of-diverse-childrens-books.html
- wisdomofthewounded.com/2020/06/29/one-white-privileged-woman-and-one-small-step-forward/

Video and Audio

- OnBeing Podcast [with Robin Diangelo and Resmaa Menakem](#)
- [Race in America by Phil Vischer](#) (creator of Veggie Tales)
- [Tim Wise on White Privilege](#)
- A 25-minute audio meditation by [Lorilyn Wiering](#), based on the writing of African-American philosopher, theologian, writer, mystic and civil rights leader, [Howard Thurman](#)
- Recommended podcasts in general: 1619; Go off, Sis; The Nod; Reveal

Recalibrating Grace: Micah, My Brain Stem, and Me

By Ann McKnight

We are in such a place of waiting. Of unknown. Of uncertainty. Of transition.

A gift of all of this shifting has been that I'm able to take a closer look at so many parts of my life and recalibrate. Clean my internal house. What am I here for again? What is this all about? How am I doing in my relationships? What is the part I am to play in my nation? What does it mean for me to be a person of faith at this moment in history?

An anchor for me with these kinds of questions has always been Micah 6:8 (I even gave a sermon on it as a senior in high school at Allen Park Presbyterian Church).

“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Simple and clear.

Sort of.

When I hear people expressing certain perspectives with adamance, when I see certain yard signs going up, when I hear certain conversations around COVID-19, when I walk downtown during a short break from my office and see varying levels of mask-wearing I can take this verse in a particular direction that I'm going to call “Brain Stem.”

When my Brain Stem response is activated I feel basic mammalian fear:

- My heart races.
- My stomach clenches.
- My muscles tense.
- I feel my jaw set.
- I attune to danger.
- I see people as enemies and a threat.

This is the part of my brain that gets my legs moving if the house is burning down long before my thinking mind even registers what is happening. My Brain Stem is a good and important part of my system. I'm grateful for it. I need

its unleashing of cortisol (stress hormone that moves me to action) to get going and energize myself to stay alive in emergency circumstances. This Brain Stem fear can show up in a number of different forms: fight, flee, freeze and fawn.

When my Brain Stem has been under long-term continuous strain as, say, during a pandemic, I find myself operating more and more through a lense of self-protection and the accompanying cortisol dumping into my body. In this heightened state, the words of Micah take on a particular reactive tone in my thoughts:

To Do Justice (reactivity/Brain Stem)

Fight

- Judging, punishing, blaming those who don't see things the way I do.
- Trying to maintain my self image as a good, moral, caring, righteous person at all costs, including dehumanizing others.
- “What is wrong with those people?!?” Othering.
- “They don't care about anyone but themselves.”
- “They are idiots/amoral/sociopaths/ignorant.”
- “Have they actually ever read the Bible?”

When I am not in Brain Stem reaction, and am feeling grounded because of the way I am caring for my own system, I am able to see a bigger view and a broader perspective than just my own survival. I hear something more gracious, and outward-reaching underneath what Micah is saying.

To Do Justice (responsive/grounded and settled)

- Emphasis on restoration and reconciliation of relationship rather than punishment or push for like-mindedness.
- Holding people accountable for impacts of their actions within a context that invites transformation.
- Ask myself what I want people to do and what I want their reason to be for doing it.
- Strong relationships have room for disagreement, as do dynamic communities.
- Moving toward difference with curiosity.
- Making space for those on the margins or those who have been silenced.
- Willingness to learn and grow.

As Brian Stevenson, lawyer and social justice activist says “We’re all more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.” I certainly want to be seen that way when I’m crabby or say something regrettable or hold an opinion that I later change my mind on. It’s a daily challenge for me to extend that same grace to others.

To Love kindness (reactive/Brain Stem) is to use numbing and fear-avoiding strategies to make the situation tolerable so I can uphold my position as a Nice Polite Christian/Midwesterner.

Flee

- Getting consumed with projects.
- Overworking.
- Avoiding news or opinions that challenge my own.
- Hiding in simplistic platitudes: “Just love people.”
- The spiritual bypass (“God’s got this so I don’t need to do anything about it.”)

Freeze

- One more glass of wine.
- Another bag of chips (cherry barbeque please).
- One more episode on Netflix.
- Disengaging socially.
- Diving into the endless well of dog videos on TikTok.
- Waiting for things outside of myself to change.

To Love Kindness (responsive/grounded and settled):

- Trusting in the natural goodness-the imprint of God that is in all of us-and doing the work to find that in those I encounter.
- Reminding myself that even if I’m not able to understand what/why someone is doing/saying a particular thing, I still know this person is a child of God and I’m glad it’s not my job to figure out how or why they need to change.
- To step back from conversation or news/social media when I notice Brain Stem activation happening so I actively take care of myself instead of numbing.
- Choosing my behaviors/how I spend time in an active way because it lines up with my values, not just a default to numb out (this includes rest and play).

To Walk humbly (reactive/Brain Stem)

Fawn

- Trying to run interference for others/justifying another’s hurtful actions.
- Not taking up space or upsetting the apple cart with my own views.

- Having some thought that God values me not caring for myself/martyrdom.
- Wanting to please everyone.
- Not speaking honestly so as not to lose connection with the good graces of a particular group or person.

To Walk Humbly (responsive/grounded and settled):

- I am a person with a brain stem and so is every other person.
- I do not have a corner on Truth.
- I, too, have been limited in my understanding of systemic racism, politically naive, ignorant regarding LGBTQ issues, religiously myopic, Holland-centric, tribalistic, and morally superior.
- I can speak with clarity out of my own values.
- I am on a path and continuing to learn.
- I need Grace.

When I look at myself through the lense of the mechanics of Brain Stem reactivity, behaviors of which I am not particularly proud make more sense. I feel less shame, less need to defend myself, and more spaciousness.

Even with this awareness, my brain will seek to defend itself through protective action if I am not tending to it consciously. It’s a mechanical issue-not a moral one. And it’s ongoing work.

Responsibility for my reactivity does not lie with:

- Those I disagree with.
- Elected officials.
- My parents.
- My children.
- My friends.
- Jim.
- My pastors.
- The powers that be.

I need more dopamine-oriented activities in my day than I ever have to balance the strain and uncertainty my Brain Stem is under. This requires strength and stamina and support. I am walking more, praying more, and adding the physicality of Qi Gong to my daily centering prayer. I am eating extra-thoughtfully. I am careful with my time and energy. I consider what I am reading and listening to with support of my Brain Stem in mind. I am finding meaningful ways to engage with my community. I try to do something every day that helps my own sense of belonging, as well as that of others. I seek out things that make me laugh.

I'm spending as much time as possible in nature. I am actively engaging with people I love, especially when I sense myself wanting to crawl into a hole.

Even as the maintenance and healing of my own Brain Stem reactivity and past pain is my work; I can also reach out to the people around me (including psychotherapists, spiritual directors, and pastors) when I need more help in doing my own work.

Perks of understanding the mechanical nature of my reactivity:

- Easier to take responsibility for my irritability/impact on others.
- Apologizing rather than blaming those closest to me.
- Words I use and actions I take are more likely to be taken seriously/have a meaningful impact.
- Caring for others by considering my impact on their Brain Stems when I am in a reactive place (reactivity is contagious).
- Moving through difficulties without baggage/paying a price later with guilt or shame.

- Appreciating my own complexity, and the wondrous complexity of others.
- Easier to be gracious and generous toward others, if not in the moment then in the big picture.
- Feeling less terrified/angry/upset on a daily basis.

At the end of the day it is God's world and not mine. This is a relief that allows me to play the part I have with the brain I have been given, steward my time, energy and passions as best I can, and trust that God is shaping the rest. Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly.

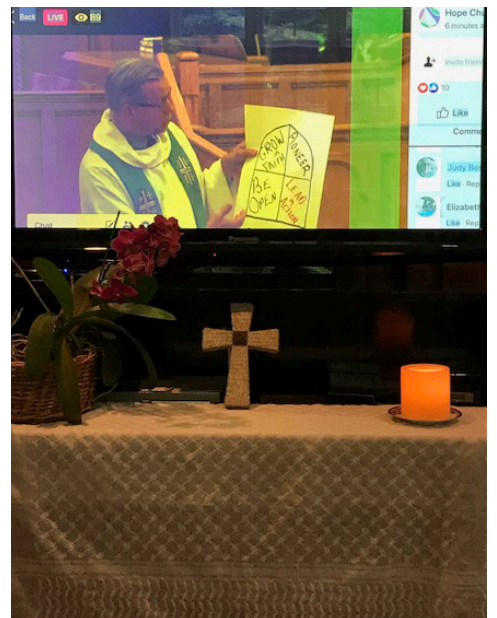
If you'd like to learn more about not just calming your system but also healing past pain including what we inherited from the generations before us I suggest *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem.

Also, of course, Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication*.

Worship Spaces: Together While Apart

These photos of worship spaces and communion preparation illustrate the reality of this season, in which, while physically separate, we join each Sunday. Thanks to all who contributed!







Poetry Corner

Hosted by Randy Smit and Rhonda Edgington

In Almighty Love, we live and move and have our being.

This poem discloses that reawakening one can sometimes have of our nearness to glory, the very Loving Presence that holds us together and all things. It can happen in a glance at the end of our rope or can be found in an oily puddle of unexpected anointing. Perhaps most importantly such moments tend to happen outside for many of us... Times when we are somewhere outside the inside of this mysterious and burgeoning Love-House of creation.

May these voices draw you in and out like living breath, beloved, for we live at "creations dawn. The morning stars still sing together, and the world, not yet half made, becomes more beautiful every day." John Muir ~Randy Smit

All That Is Glorious Around Us

(title of an exhibit on The Hudson River School)

By Barbara Crooker

is not, for me, these grand vistas, sublime peaks, mist-filled overlooks, towering clouds, but doing errands on a day of driving rain, staying dry inside the silver skin of the car, 160,000 miles, still running just fine. Or later, sitting in a café warmed by the steam from white chicken chili, two cups of dark coffee, watching the red and gold leaves race down the street, confetti from autumn's bright parade. And I think of how my mother struggles to breathe, how few good days she has now, how we never think about the glories of breath, oxygen cascading down our throats to the lungs, simple as the journey of water over a rock. It is the nature of stone / to be satisfied / writes Mary Oliver, It is the nature of water / to want to be somewhere else, rushing down a rocky tor or high escarpment, the panoramic landscape boundless behind it. But everything glorious is around us already: black and blue graffiti shining in the rain's bright glaze, the small rainbows of oil on the pavement, where the last car to park has left its mark on the glistening street, this radiant world.

Barbara Crooker from Radiance. © Word Press, 2005.