



SALT & LIGHT

a hope church publication

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CONTENTS

Longing for God's Kindom	2
First Week of Advent	3
Second and Third Weeks of Advent	4
Christmas Cards, Fourth Sunday of Advent, & Christmas Eve Services	5
Children's Ministry	6
Coloring Page	7
The Gift of Advent	8
Soul Tending in These Days	8
Teach Us to Pray: Lament	10
Queer Christianity: Meditations on Exile	11
Connecting with one Another: Gratitude	12
Introducing Elliot Weidenaar	13
Self-Care as Advent Preparation	13
Five Loaves and Two Fish: An Update	14
Poetry Corner	16

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

Megan Arevalo, Michael Kolk, & Lois Maassen

Longing for God's Kindom

By Pastor Jill Russell

When the Consistory decided back in June that the Hope Church building would remain closed to in-person gatherings through the end of the year, I distinctly remember the moment when it dawned on us that we were talking about the seasons of Advent and Christmas. This did not change what the Consistory ultimately decided was necessary, but it led us to lament together how hard it seemed to imagine this season without being physically together for this sacred time. I also remember us saying "hopefully things will improve by then and we can reverse this decision in time for Advent." Sadly, as the COVID cases turn the marker back in the upward direction, we have had to get creative to find ways to enter this season in a physically distant manner.

Advent is all about the human ache and longing for God's kindom to come on earth as it is in heaven. By the way, kindom is not a typo. I am coming to use this term more and more as a replacement for the traditional word kingdom. Not only does it remove the gendered connotation of a realm ruled by a male king, but it also emphasizes that what unites us in God's realm is the way we are drawn by God's Spirit to recognize that in Jesus Christ we are all kin to one another. The bonds of kinship are the currency of God's realm. Ever since the bonds of kinship were broken in the garden of Eden we have been longing for these bonds to be repaired and restored. When I look at all that is tearing at the social fabric of our lives, this season is coming at just the right time for us to voice our deep need for God to come near to us and embody for us again the way of Jesus – the great Emmanuel, God-with-us – who reveals what is needed to restore the kinship for which we are all made.

Join us each Sunday evening of Advent by Zoom for an intergenerational Advent Candlelight Gathering. We will each in our respective homes light the candles of our Advent wreaths: hope, peace, joy, and love. If ever there was a time to sit before the gathering light and pray for hope and peace and joy and love this Advent season would be the one! On two of the evenings of Advent we invite you to transition over to Facebook Live for an additional offering of music in the sanctuary. We are very grateful to our associate music director and organist, Rhonda Edgington, for envisioning and preparing these evenings for us along with others who will be joining her!

One additional declaration made at that June 8th Consistory meeting is coming to fruition: we *will* gather in our parking lot on Christmas Eve just before midnight with our candles and our voices raised to meet Christmas day singing "Joy to the World!" We will spread out and take all the precautions we need to take – but we will be together on that holy night for those who are able to join us. And so we enter into Advent with the prayer "Come, O Come, Emmanuel" on our lips and in our hearts.

Peace to you, Pastor Jill



First Week of Advent: November 29

Making Advent Wreaths: Nov. 28 & 29

On Saturday and Sunday (November 28 & 29 1 p.m.-3 p.m.) you're invited to the Hope Church parking lot under the canopy to make an Advent Wreath to use for the coming Advent Candlelight Gatherings. Sign up here: tinyurl.com/hopewreath. We will have tables, greens, wreath holders, candles and our new outdoor heaters all set up for you to come and make a wreath and see some Hope Church friends! Masks will be required and we will distance ourselves as households but hope to take advantage of the canopy as a space we can be together outside.

Advent Candlelight Gathering: Nov. 29

6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. on Zoom on November 29. We will share in a song and litany as we light our first candles. Jocelyn will share with all of us what the children have received in their Advent boxes and some previews of the season. We will also make space to share a time of fellowship among those who have gathered as we would have done over tables had we been in the Commons for our Advent dinner together.



Advent & Christmas Organ Music

There will be two December organ music events livestreamed on the Hope Church Facebook page this year, for those who love holiday organ music.

The first will be an evening of Advent and Christmas music and poetry – on Sunday, December 6 at 6:30 p.m. This will be led by Rhonda Edgington and Laurie Baron, and feature music and texts.

Special musicians will include Perry Landes (Guitar), Jennie Vanderlugt (Voice), and Dan Griswold (Viola). This is a new idea – something special and different for 2020, because this December is going to feel different, so we need something extra-special and creative to help us all out!

We will be choosing poems and texts that correspond to music selected for the holiday, and intersperse readings with music. Hoping for a meditative and contemplative evening around texts and music for the season.

The second will be an Advent/Christmas hymn sing, live from the Hope Church sanctuary, with a chance for all of you to request beforehand your favorite hymns to sing! This will be held on Sunday, December 20 at 6:30 p.m.

Barb and Dave Schmitt will lead the singing from the sanctuary. This will be a service made up of just singing our favorite Advent and Christmas hymns with organ, so start thinking of which hymn(s) you love and want to make sure you have a chance to sing this year.

If you would like to request a hymn to be included for this event, use this link (tinyurl.com/hymnrequest) to request 1 or 2 hymns to be sung. Depending on response, we may only sing a couple verses of most hymns, so make a special note if you definitely want all verses, or if you have a particular verse you do not want to have left out!

Second Week of Advent: December 6

Advent Candlelight Gathering

6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. on Zoom. After sharing in our song and litany we will light our second candles. A story in honor of St. Nicholas will also be shared and maybe a surprise or two.

Evening of Advent Poetry and Song

6:30 p.m. on Facebook Live. Rhonda Edgington and Laurie Baron have planned an evening of poetry and song to help to draw us all more deeply into the spiritual riches of this season of Advent.

Third Week of Advent: December 13

Advent Candlelight Gathering

6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. on Zoom. We will light our third candles and view a special caroling video that is being curated to share with those whom we would have visited for Christmas caroling. After viewing the video together we will have a Christmas Cookie Show-and-Tell, when we can show each other the Christmas cookies we've made that we will collect to share with the Community Kitchen. Details for the Christmas Cookie Collection will be shared in the weeks ahead.

Christmas Caroling Video - Submissions Needed by December 1

We hope that many singers, instrumentalists and families will submit a beloved Christmas carol video, and we will then create a 10-15 minute video collection of carols. We'd like your carol to be approximately 1 minute in length. In order to be included, please email your video file or link to your cloud file to djoldersma@gmail.com by **December 1**. Please state your full name/s when submitting your video. Dan Joldersma will be the creative editor and Brian/Rhonda will advise as needed. Thanks for spreading more holiday cheer and hopefulness of the season!

Christmas Cards for Our Members

Enrich your Advent season by sharing Christmas cards by **December 13** with members who will receive caroling. Decorated gift bags for each will be on pegboards in the vestibule off the parking lot entrance to collect your card contributions. The vestibule is open 9 am - 3 pm, Monday-Thursday.



Christmas Card Mailing List

LeVada Bombe
Ted & Shirley Bosch
Maxine DeBruyn
Dan DeGraaf
Jean DeWeert
Peggy Fitzgerald
Marjorie French
Michael Henry
Betty Hildore
Stephanie Krom
Joan Lalley
Kay MacKenzie
Mary Martin
Justin & Stephanie Meyers
Rode Molla & Endrias Assen
Rae Pearson
Susan & Mark Rhoades
Connie Thornhill
Rowland & Jane Van Es
Phil Van Eyl
Josh & Nicolý Vis
Lila Vohlken
Joan & Lee Wenke

Fourth Week of Advent: December 20

Advent Candlelight Gathering

6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m. on Zoom. On this fourth Sunday in Advent we will light the candle of love and share a story that brings to mind the Christmas Pageants of years past. Children have been sharing the gospel story of Jesus's birth for generations and while we will not be able to do this in the same way this year, we remember this tradition as we gather together.

Christmas Carol Sing

6:30 p.m. on Facebook Live. Rhonda Edgington along with Barbara and Dave Schmitt will share an evening of Christmas carols from the sanctuary of Hope Church.

Christmas Eve Services: December 24

Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols Service

6:30 p.m. on Facebook Live. This service, broadcast from the Hope Church sanctuary, will include lessons and carols as well as a story for children. Hear again the good news as the scriptures and carols, the music and candlelight all point us toward the revelation of God-with-us.

Christmas Eve Candlelighting Ceremony

11:30 p.m. in the parking lot of Hope Church. We will gather outdoors to light our candles and sing "Joy to the World" as the church bells ring in joyful celebration of Jesus's birth bringing light to the world.



Advent Traditions for Children

By Jocelyn Van Heest, Children's Ministry Director

The children know that it's the beginning of the church year. We've just completed Growing Time and are now entering a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth. Each week the children have watched the pointer on the church-year circle move closer to the purple weeks of Advent. They know that purple is the color of preparation and waiting. The purple cloths are being displayed, the Advent wreaths are being lit, and the children will hear the stories of the prophets and the angels telling of the coming of our Lord.

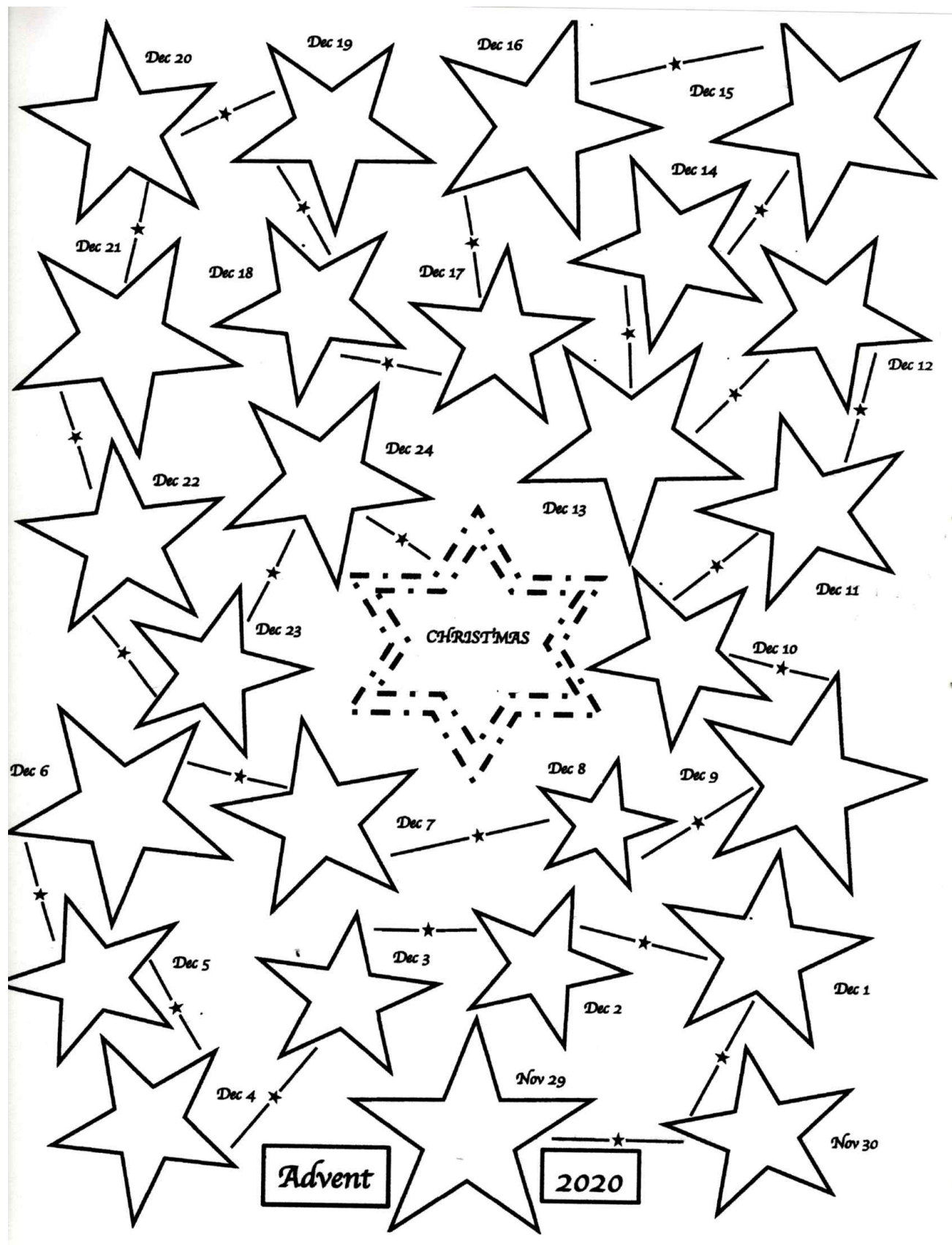
Our Hope Church family has many wonderful Advent traditions: craft night, making cards for Hope Church members, caroling, St. Nicholas Day breakfast, the lighting of the Advent wreath, the Tree of Light giving, the 'unrehearsed nativity pageant', sharing wonderful music and especially our times of worship. While these events will

not occur in person this year, the traditions will continue in different ways. Each child will receive a special "Advent Box" that will have some supplies to help families share in the preparation for Christmas. Inside the box are some crafts (yes, Advent chain materials), devotionals, St. Nicholas treats, card making supplies, and more.

Everyone is encouraged to join in Zoom gatherings each Sunday night in Advent for the lighting of our Advent candles and other special events. **The excitement of the children is such a joy; this is a wonderful opportunity for all Hope Church folks to share in that joy.** We as a body of Christ help with the nurturing of the faith of our children, and this is a great way to show love and support to the families and children of our church. We hope to see many of you share in this time of waiting and preparation with our families.

Praying in Color: Advent Coloring Page

This coloring page is for all ages, both adults and children, and gives the opportunity to color a star each day and spend time in focused thought.



The Gift of Advent

By Beth Carroll, Associate Pastor of Discipleship

Challenging and unstable times remind us why we *need* Advent. Though we might feel as if we are being catapulted into the unknown, Advent reminds us that we are tethered to the all-loving, ever-present Trinity. I wrote this essay for *The Twelve* a few years ago about my personal discovery in the life-giving grounding made available through my own Advent rituals. I hope it inspires hope and reassurance that we are always held.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. Isaiah 11:1

The lie of divorce is that you lose only a spouse. But divorce is the gift that keeps on taking. You lose his family. You lose the sacredness of memories together.

You lose your home and the artifacts that make it a home. You lose financial security. You lose the emotional security of your children. But one loss few anticipate is the loss of tradition. Nothing highlights this more than the first Christmas after a divorce. Jesus might be the reason for the season, but family is the tree that bears the fruit of that season. What happens when the family tree is severed in half?

Something new is needed to burst through the brokenness. That first holiday season, I bought an Advent wreath on a whim. Like holy smelling salts, the fragrance of the evergreen branches called out life, when all I knew was death. The wreath's elegant candles pointing skyward needed me to ignite them if they were to be a light in my darkness. I took them home from the farmers' market that cold Thanksgiving week, placed

them on my kitchen table, and introduced them to my curious children. Visions of playing with matches danced in their heads.

“Something new is needed to burst through the brokenness.”

The first night of Advent we gathered at the dinner table. We said a prayer. We read about the angel visiting Mary. We lit our first Advent candle and let the dim, warm light fill the darkness of the room and our hearts. Christmas would never be the same.

Soul Tending in These Days

By Mary Van Andel

“So,” I said to my husband, Ben, “I’ve been asked to write an article about spiritual self-care during these times, with a focus on Advent. I don’t feel like I know much about spiritual self-care, even less so right now. I would probably just tell them to go see their Elizabeth.”

“Well, there’s your article,” he said. Maybe Ben was right.

Though I am typically quite content in my own company and favor approaching troubles by rolling up my sleeves, I am aware that these days, I feel uncharacteristically lonely and somewhat anxious. I’m weary of endless political ads, the overuse of superlatives, and one attention-seeking shenanigan more appalling than the last. My personal and political efforts

feel paltry and ineffectual in the face of our imperiled planet and our mortal kin; millions bereft of a place to lay their heads, food in their bellies, care for their wounds, safety for their children, and basic human dignity. And then there’s COVID-19 and vigilante militias. From what I’m hearing, I’m not alone.

In our immediate context, a good bit of which might rightly

be called first-world problems or self-inflicted wounds, and as Advent approaches, I am drawn to the first chapter of Luke's gospel, and the character of Mary. In a quiet, homely story, the angel Gabriel drops by Mary's house one day and simply announces that she will birth the Light of the world. There's Mary, out in the backyard, humming to herself while hanging clothes on the line to dry. Then, no thunder, no rushing winds, no trumpets sounding, she is forever changed. The text uses the word "overshadowed" (1:35 NRSV) to describe what happened to Mary. In contemporary usage, to be overshadowed is to feel hidden or made invisible, as one might be by a more charismatic sibling or colleague. But in the scriptures, to be overshadowed is to be in the very presence of God.

This story has caught the imagination of artists from early Christian drawings on the walls of Rome's catacombs to Picasso; it is beloved by Christians the world over. I wonder why? None but Mary has been chosen to birth the Christ child, to bathe and feed and scold and worry about him, to argue with and correct him, to refuse to shield their eyes from his crucified body, then to bathe and anoint him for burial, and once he was resurrected, ponder the angel's words in her heart yet again. To be "overshadowed" cannot be conjured. It is a rare gift for God's purposes alone. Could it be the story captures the hearts of so many because we, too, have homely moments in the presence of God that change us forever? No thunder, no trumpets, but while weeding in the garden, cleaning the attic, hiking in the Rockies, we have the sense that we are in the very presence of the holy, and in fact, we are forever changed.

To speak of being in the presence of the holy may sound much overplayed, something that happens only to rarified characters in the Bible or eccentrics who live in the desert eating bugs and roots. Actually, it's fairly common for regular people to experience the holy, but those moments aren't always recognized as holy. Further, experiences we might recognize as holy sometimes have an isolating effect. Something that rattles our spiritual timbers isn't something we tend to talk about in the coffee shop. It's for this reason I invite you to find your Elizabeth this Advent – for the care of your own spirit.

“When we can talk with someone who is invested in understanding us, it validates our experience...”

After Mary was overshadowed, she packed her bags and headed for the hill country to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. I doubt it was just a lark. Remember, Elizabeth was in her sixth month of a miraculous pregnancy. Elizabeth's husband, Zechariah, had also been visited by an angel and was struck dumb for the duration of the pregnancy. In short, Elizabeth knew something of the strange territory Mary would traverse. I'm guessing Mary needed the support and validation of her cousin, Elizabeth.

You may already have someone in your life who serves as your Elizabeth, someone with whom you can talk about your holy moments. Your conversations

may not sound “holy.” You may tell that person about being dumbfounded by the quality of light on an afternoon walk, how it felt to hold your newborn child, what it was like to keep vigil with a dying person, about the day you heard a story on the radio while driving and just had to pull over and weep, about a poem that gave words to an unnamed something you've carried for years. These are inklings of the holy. When we can talk with someone who is invested in understanding us, it validates our experience, just as Elizabeth's baby leaping in her womb validated Mary's experience.

If you are someone for whom such a conversation just doesn't feel right, expressing experience of the holy through music, writing, poetry, or visual art forms are time honored ways. Some may have someone with whom you are so safe and your bond so tender, that words are not necessary to convey your experience of the holy. Some may commune only with God. The person-to-person way of soul tending is not for everyone, but if you simply haven't nurtured that kind of relationship, this might be the time. If you long for an Elizabeth, perhaps it's time to pack your metaphorical bags and head for the hill country to be with your Elizabeth.

Teach Us to Pray: Lament

By Carol Bechtel



Read

Psalm 13

How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? (Psalm 13:2a, NRSV)

I teach a class on the psalms at Western Theological Seminary. One of the things I tell my students is: The book of Psalms contains 150 of the best friends you'll ever have. And the *best* of these best friends for me are the psalms of lament. These are psalms like:

- 13, which begins “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” Or—
- 22—which Jesus prayed from the cross: “My God, my God—why have you forsaken me?”

These are psalms that give us words to pray when we've run out of words.

One of the best things that anyone ever told me about the lament psalms is that they are “praise in a minor key.” Isn't that great? Bernhard Anderson said that. *Praise in a minor key*. You know the difference between a major and a minor key. But, think about it: when you're singing in a minor key, you're still *singing*. That's important. God wants to hear our sad songs, too. We owe God that kind of honesty.

So, pray the lament psalms. They're easy to spot. They're the ones that begin by complaining! But you can also write your own lament. It's easier than you think. It's a three-part pattern: Protest, Petition, and Praise.

“...when you're singing in a minor key, you're still singing.”

- First you **protest**—lay out your complaints and your griefs before God. Don't hold back. God can handle it.
- Then **petition** God for what you want. Be bold—although it might also be a good idea to include “Thy will be done.”
- Lastly—**praise** God for listening, for caring, and for considering your prayer.

I hope you'll try this. It's a pattern that's worked for thousands of years!

Ponder

What do you want to complain about to God? What's holding you back?

Pray

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely (Ps. 139:1 & 4).

Hear, now, my lament, which will not be “news” to you.

May it be the beginning of a candid and productive conversation.

First published at CarolMBechtels.com in her “Teach Us to Pray” series.

Queer Christianity: Meditations on Exile

By Elliot Weidenaar, Western Theological Seminary Intern

I have spent much of my life in Iowa – a place that in my childhood was largely socially liberal. In the past ten years that has changed. In the past five years I have fled Iowa three times: once to the District of Columbia, once to London, and now I live in Holland, Michigan. There are many things that I could probably write about being in Holland or about my background, but none of them seem to flow from my heart well or easily. So in response to this odd constipation of the heart, I began to meditate on the passages that we as an ecumenical church have been touching on in the lectionary. As I meditated I continually heard the voice of God saying “Here stands my child, standing in exile.”

This season of my life is one of exile, and the seasons of exile in our lives often tend to be the ones we draw from; after all, they inform how we understand ourselves and others in reference to our belief systems. However, as I continued to meditate on this I began to wonder if perhaps all queer people live the majority of their Christian lives in exile. You see, I have been queer much (if not all) of my life, and there is often a level of hurt and

tension that comes between you and your faith community when you are queer. My heart, soul, my nephesh began to ask God “What does it mean for me, for my community to live our lives in Exile?” So I began to scour the Bible for something that might bolster my heart, answer my question, or tell me that my theory was wrong. I was soon drawn to the Magnificat.

In Luke 1:46-47 the virgin says “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” Here, a young woman without means or prospects actively follows God out of the comfort of her betrothal and into the wilderness of the Incarnation. If Joseph had not obeyed God, and had quietly divorced Mary what would she have done? She knew that by following God she was walking into a period of exile – a period of being outside the natural order of Greco-Roman society.

So within my own heart leapt up hope in that moment. If exile is a portion of all of our faith journeys, including the faith journey of the Virgin Mother,

then this too shall pass. This desert in which I and, I would argue, we collectively as an ecumenical church, are standing in can be navigated. It can be navigated, and it will not be navigated by us but rather by the great pillar of cloud that leads through all of our trials and triumphs in faith.

Frankly this year has been a hard one, both on a personal level and for the queer community in regard to our relationship with the church. At the start of this year the United Methodist church announced it would split over unreconciled differences in regards to homosexual marriage and clergy. Six months later the Reformed Church in America released a document that provided similar recommendations. However, just as with the Virgin Mary, there is hope for the relationship between the queer community and the Church. Recently the Pope has endorsed the idea of homosexual civil unions because family is one of the central tenets of our faith. Exile gets much easier when one can see Mount Sinai. I will leave with you a poem I wrote many years ago in one of the greatest periods of personal exile.

*I am in love with the Holy Mother Church,
Yet she will never love me as I love her.
Unwieldy and imperfect
She has been a hateful, absent and neglectful mother.
Lost inside her own bottle, the one labeled evangelical.
So I went into the desert to find my Father,
The one my mother never shuts up about.
I walked 40 days and 40 nights, following a star.
And I found him – in a burning bush at the foot of a mountain.*

Connecting with One Another

Gratitude

My name is Kelli and as a team leader at Escape Career Connections, I just want to say thank you for supporting the program this year. By offering a space to work, you gave these young people an opportunity to cultivate valuable life skills and to build their resumes. I got to see firsthand the difference that these jobs made in the lives of those involved in the program.

This makes a huge difference in our community, in the lives of young people who need it most, and in my life too. Thank you again!

~Kelli at Escape Ministries



Dear Hope Church brothers and sisters in Christ,

Thank you so much for sharing our joy, Hallela, whom we receive from God! Our pregnancy season was very challenging due to COVID-19, but your presence was our shield and strength. Hallela Member Endrias is ours, yours, and God's! Every day when we see Hallela, we give thanks to God for God's miraculous and loving gift! Thank you for being our partner and support in every part of our life! Love, joy, and peace be with you all!

~Hallela, Rode and Endrias

Introducing Seminary Intern Elliot Weidenaar



It is with great enthusiasm that we introduce our new Western Theological Seminary student, Elliot Weidenaar. Elliot has a passion for youth and young adults, especially for those who have not yet found a comfortable home in the church. He will start his internship by working primarily with Pastor Beth, but will become more visible in leading worship and engaging other ministries next semester. If you see him on Facebook or around town, say hello! Here is a little background about Elliot.

Hi! I'm Elliot, and I'm a new seminary intern. I'm originally from Marshalltown, Iowa and graduated from Central College in Pella with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in December 2019. I live in Holland at Western's Friendship house with three roommates and many friends. I enjoy ballet and fencing (although these days it is hard to do either) as well as reading while drinking warm Earl Grey tea. I have a heart for youth, young adults, and folks who sit outside of traditionally "Christian" groups in the modern United States. I look forward to beginning and engaging at Hope Church!



Self-Care as Advent Preparation

By Ginger Clark, RN, Parish Nurse

As we approach and participate in Advent there are practical ways to prepare so we can fully experience this celebration. Let's find ways to reset and resync our lives to be more in tune with the real meaning and blessings of this holy season. To truly receive the hope, peace, love, and joy

of God, we must practice self-care to be able to absorb and be blessed with these wonderful gifts.

Self-care describes a conscious act you take to promote your own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. It is a "multidimensional, multifaceted process of purposeful engagement of

strategies that promote healthy functioning and enhance wellbeing.” It’s important to evaluate how you’re caring for yourself in different areas so you can ensure you’re caring for body, mind, and spirit.

Physical care includes how nutritiously you eat, how much sleep you get, and how much physical activity you participate in. Also important is how you are caring for your physical needs—taking medications, making doctors’ appointments, and managing your health. Get your flu vaccine as soon as possible. Continue to follow best practice against the spread of COVID-19: wash your hands often, avoid touching your face, wear a face mask when around others in public, practice physical distancing, clean and disinfect your home and workplace, and cover coughs and sneezes.

Mental care includes spending time doing things that stimulate your mind: puzzles, crafts, reading, inspirational movies or podcasts. Be proactive in staying mentally healthy. Recognize and celebrate your own abilities and purpose and be flexible to change. Seek help when you acknowledge areas of vulnerability so you can create a good balance of self and relationships.

Emotional care helps us develop healthy coping skills. Include activities to help acknowledge and express your feelings regularly. We are more resilient and able to handle life’s stresses when we feel our best physically and emotionally. Taking time out to care for yourself can remind you and others that your needs are important too. This can also make you a better caregiver to others.

Social self-care is essential but often times difficult to balance. Close connections and relationships are important to our well-being. How are you nurturing your relationships with friends and family?

Spiritual self-care Are you engaging in spiritual practices that are fulfilling? Make nurturing your spirit a regular practice as this has been proven to promote a healthier body and mind connection. Advent is marked by a spirit of expectation, anticipation, preparation and longing. May you experience all that this season has for you!

Five Loaves and Two Fish: An Update

By Peter Boogaart, Creation Care Coordinator

“Enough is enough!” Maybe you’ve heard those words? They may be buried somewhere deep in your childhood memory. Remember pushing too far? Dad was letting you know that this was the boundary and your show was over.

It’s possible, too, to say that “Enough is never enough.” Just before bedtime, was there ever enough story time? Is there ever too much love? Do you still hear your mother’s voice and want more?

Our human world is bounded by parameters—too much and too little. The United Nations has a seventeen-point metric

to access human wellbeing. Frequently, they find not enough. Not enough housing. Not enough food. Not enough medical care.

For some of us, the issue is too much. Too much food. Too much media. Too much privilege. Where do you draw the lines? Without Dad around to impose them, how do you know where the lines are?

Theologian Ched Myers explores “enough” in his analysis of Exodus 16. The Israelites are in peril. Food and water have run out. Death in the wilderness seems imminent. They complain against God and against Moses. In response, God provides bread in the form of manna each morning and

meat in the form of quail each night—every day for 40 years!

What do we learn from this? Myers develops his argument for Sabbath Economics. First, all provision comes from God. Remember the Lord’s Prayer? “Give us this day our daily bread...” God, the Creator, gives abundantly and faithfully. The natural world was always enough. Enough bread and enough quail for everyone.

Second, notice what happens when some people take too much. The manna spoils in their jars overnight. Hoarding is a witness to lack of faith. Hoarding means that God can’t

be trusted and I need to look out for myself. Myers draws an economic principle from this story: In a properly functioning economy, one that embodies God's principles, everybody has enough and nobody has too much. Provision only has value when it circulates and moves from where it is to where it's needed. Hoarding, the withholding of gifts, devalues life.

For the last three years, I've been part of a Hope Church small group which explores this question of "enough." Where to draw the line? It's not an easy analysis. We're not nomadic herders and dryland farmers. How do you define enough in a capitalized, urban, culture? We're finding that we may have too much time, too many clothes, or too much stuff. We're challenging ourselves to let it go. Let it have value for someone else.

We created one rule for our giving up: If you can't do it with joy, don't do it. If your family is financially stressed already, you may not have funds to give up. If you feel pressured or shamed into giving, don't do it. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. The blessing isn't in the money, it's in living in congruence with your values. Joy comes from properly ordered relationships.

In some cases, letting go has monetary value. Miles not driven have value. Energy efficiencies realized have value. Meat not consumed has value. For us the question was how to properly deploy that value. Hope Church helped us by creating a Sabbath Economics line item on its books, with the agreement that each year we would designate a recipient while encouraging the fund to grow.

This year there was \$600 in the fund to be deployed. We asked Consistory to approve Good Samaritan Ministries' Eviction Diversion Program as the recipient and for permission to challenge the congregation to match the amount. They said, "Yes, and we'll match your gift right now and challenge the congregation to match the \$1,200". You all did more than that. The final check was for \$3,300—a real five loaves and two fish moment!

We invite you to join us in this Sabbath Economics practice. How do you define enough? If your process reveals something of monetary value, find a place to share it. There are lots of needy people waiting to hear from you. If you choose to use the Sabbath Economics fund, you can join us next year in picking a new recipient.



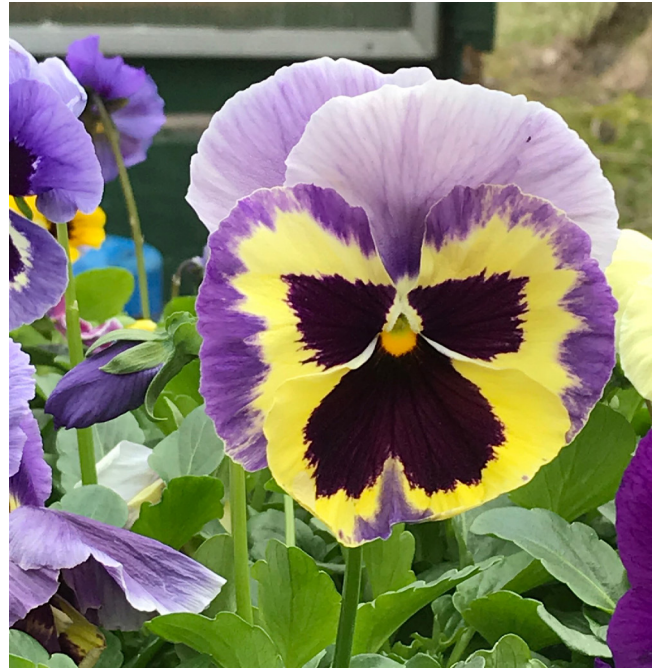
Poetry Corner

Hosted by Randy Smit and Rhonda Edgington

We are honored to welcome one of Hope Church's resident poets to this month's Poetry Corner: Sharon Arendshorst. "This poem was written in the spring of 2020, early in Michigan's lockdown, during the discussion of essential workers. The poem written by Lucille Clifton, although written decades ago, speaks to the racial reality of today."

Many writers have discussed feeling unable to write in these current times – when so much deserves our attention, and so many emotions are wrestling inside of us, so much uncertainty, pain, conflict, and grief swirling around as well. I thank Sharon for the inspiration these poems show us – that we don't have to pen theological, political, or psychological treatises on the state of everything happening in our lives or the world. It can be enough to take one single moment (one photograph, one flower) and stay with that for as long as we need.

~Rhonda



Photograph

By Lucille Clifton

*my grandsons
spinning in their joy*

universe
keep them turning turning
black blurs against the window
of the world
for they are beautiful
and there is trouble coming
round and round and round

In the Driveway of Harkema's Nursery, Closed Due to the Pandemic

By Sharon Nelson Arendshorst,
April 2020 for Landscapes

A peeling green cart with yellow wheels
stands as if in a Parisian flower stall
beside a flatbed trailer of pansies,
a colorful pointillist painting under gray skies.

Against a rusting wheelbarrow,
a hand-painted sign leans,
pricing flats of pansies, potting soil,
and planted pansy pots.

One large pansy draws me near.
Two pale violet petals form an aura
behind her three-petaled, purple-edged,
yellow face. Deep plum-brown
eyes and mouth frown.

All around the pansies frown—
Such beauty and anger
Such joy and grief
Such defiance and tenderness.

I've never planted pansies before.
Today I buy two essential flats.