

**Wisdom Circle – Hope
December, 2015**

PREPARATION

Words of Wisdom

“Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all the darkness.”
~Desmond Tutu

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”
~Martin Luther King Jr.

“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.”
~Thich Nhat Hanh

“A leader is a dealer in hope.”
~Napoleon Bonaparte

“Hope is like peace. It is not a gift from God. It is a gift only we can give one another.”
~Elie Wiesel

“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul - and sings the tunes without the words - and never stops at all.”
~Emily Dickinson

“He that lives upon hope will die fasting.”
~Benjamin Franklin

“Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.”
~Friedrich Nietzsche

“Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.”
~Dale Carnegie

“To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.”
~Gilbert K. Chesterton

Readings:

“Depression Part Two”, by Allie Brosh

This “reading” is actually an online comic strip. It is about the author, Allie Brosh’s, experience with depression. However, it also – unromantically - explores the topic of hope and hopelessness. How do you see hope being addressed in this comic strip? Warning: there is some adult language.

<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2013/05/depression-part-two.html>

(Or search for “Depression Part Two” and “Allie Brosh”)

Unfortunately, due to length, the comic cannot be copied into the text of this handout. If you are not able to access the website, below are several excellent poems that also address the topic of hope, with particular reference to the season of Advent:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers By Emily Dickinson

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

“Your Luck Is About To Change”

By Susan Elizabeth Howe

(A fortune cookie)

Ominous inscrutable Chinese news to get just before Christmas, considering my reasonable health, marriage spicy as moo-goo-gai-pan, career running like a not-too-old Chevrolet. Not bad, considering what can go wrong: the bony finger of Uncle Sam might point out my husband, my own national guard, and set him in Afghanistan; my boss could take a personal interest; the pain in my left knee could spread to my right. Still, as the old year tips into the new,

I insist on the infant hope, gooing and kicking his legs in the air. I won't give in to the dark, the sub-zero weather, the fog, or even the neighbors' Nativity.

Their four-year-old has arranged his whole legion of dinosaurs so they, too, worship the child, joining the cow and sheep. Or else, ultimate mortals, they've come to eat ox and camel, Mary and Joseph, then savor the newborn babe.

The Risk of Birth (Christmas, 1973)

by Madeleine L'Engle

This is no time for a child to be born, With the earth betrayed by war & hate And a comet slashing the sky to warn That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born, In a land in the crushing grip of Rome; Honour & truth were trampled by scorn- Yet here did the Saviour make his home.

When is the time for love to be born? The inn is full on the planet earth, And by a comet the sky is torn- Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Advent Poem

By Enuma Okoro

I want to find my place amongst the people of Advent but I can't quite decide who I am. I want to be pregnant with God but it takes such a toll on the body. I have given birth to things before. And labor is hard and untimely. I want to welcome angels and say yes, to anything, but if I saw an angel I would hold him hostage and send a ransom note of questions demanding answers, to God. I want to cheer blessings from the sidelines with a belly growing with prophecies, and have friends and strangers take hope. Because God has a season for those whose seasons have passed. I want to put my trust in dreams and in the words of the ones I love, to believe that God is as close as the one who would share my bed. But mostly I want a break from being the one who mostly falls silent in the presence of all that's holy, who loses her words in disbelief, terrified by claims of joy and gladness, unable to believe that prayers are answered.

Questions for Reflection:

- What do you hope for?
- What is something that brings you hope?
- Have you ever felt hopeless? What pulled you through that time?

Spiritual Exercise:

This time of year, in the face of so much holiday marketing that urges cheer, optimism, and celebration, it can be hard to open up about feelings of hopelessness, despair, and even depression (which is especially common in the winter). Paradoxically, it can be a lonely time for people who can't participate in the joyfulness, but don't want to burden others with their own feelings. Are there people in your life who you suspect might be experiencing sadness, hopelessness, or depression? Are you experiencing these things? Your spiritual exercise for December is to reach out to someone who may be experiencing these things, and to listen to them. Resist the urge to offer "good news" or a "silver lining." Simply be accepting and affirming of that person in the state that they are in, and hear from them about their experience. If it is you who are experiencing sadness, hopelessness, or depression, take some time to share with a trusted loved one what you are experiencing. You may discover that you are not alone in your experience.

**Wisdom Circle – Hope
Session Plan**

This session plan is a suggested guide, not a rigid set of rules. You may adjust this plan as you feel is appropriate in your group.

Gathering & Welcome (~5 min)

Chalice Lighting (~2 min)

Optional Song or Reading—if someone in the group feels comfortable doing so, they might sing the song once through and invite the rest of the group to join in singing the 2nd time:

*Rise Up, O Flame
By thy light glowing
Show to us Beauty, Vision, and Joy*

(Singing the Living Tradition #362)
(Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enFmujHVy2M>)

Rise Up, O Flame 362

♩ = 112

① Rise up, O flame, ② by thy light glow - ing,

show to us beau - ty, vi - sion, and joy.

Words: Anonymous
Music: Christoph Praetorius

CHALICE
4.5.5.4.

Check-In (20-30 minutes)

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share one thing that is lifting your spirits, and one thing that is weighing you down. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (10 minutes)

Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings; Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...

Discussion (60 minutes)

Introduce Topic. Take Turns Reading aloud the "Words of Wisdom."

- What do you hope for?
- What is something that brings you hope?
- Have you ever felt hopeless? What pulled you through that time?

Silent Reflection (~2 minutes)

First Responses (Share in the order you feel moved)

Cross-Conversation (Ask questions that invite deeper reflection; Speak from personal experience, and use "I statements"; Avoid explaining or judging)

Final Thoughts (Share in the order you feel moved)

Gratitude (5-10 minutes)

Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.

Closing

Optional Chalice Extinguishing Reading:

"We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts. May it light your path as you leave this place. May it guide your way until we are together again."

~Martha L. Munson