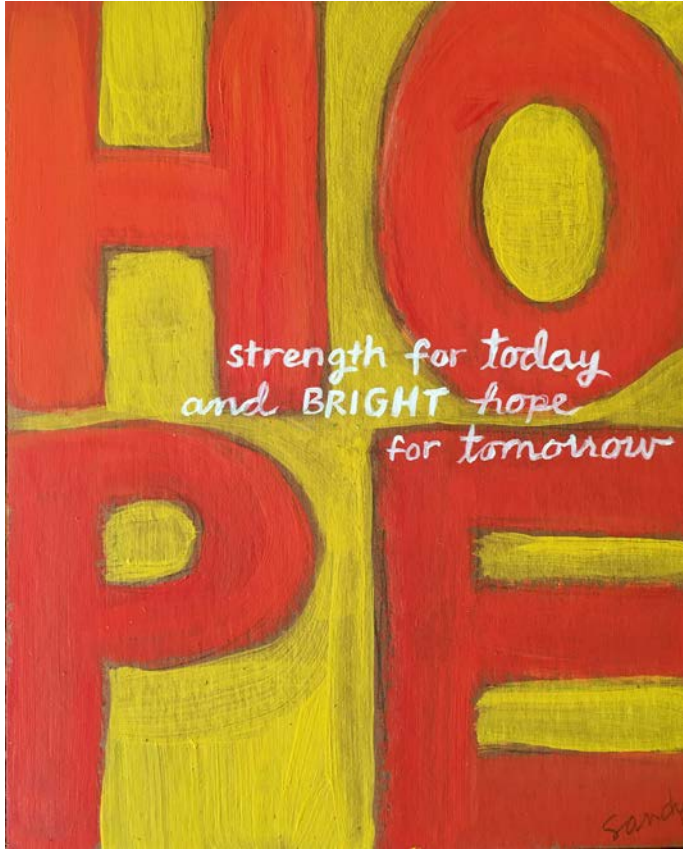


THE RADIX PROJECT
small groups / deep roots



WINTER 2023: HOPE IN HARD TIMES



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



THE RADIX PROJECT ♦ www.saintmarks.org/radix

The Radix Project: Small Groups/Deep Roots is an opportunity to be part of a small group that meets over the course of six weeks to share stories, study scripture, and pray for one another. This is the ninth iteration since the project was launched in early 2020 and we have adapted to offer Zoom and in-person offerings.

A small group is a cohort of people who gather to get to know one another against the backdrop of shared stories, scripture, and prayer. This is not a working group; there is no task to be accomplished. It is about knowing one another, and being known, as we are known by God. And that is the root of spiritual transformation.

The name for this communal effort—The Radix Project—draws on the Latin word for “root,” which is *radix*. Jesus modeled small group relationships in his life and ministry, and the early Church was structured on small groups who worshipped, prayed, and cared for one another. Those are our roots, and in our time, when so many pressures of modern life leave us feeling alone and isolated, Christian community offers us a tangible way of entering into relationships rooted in trust and mutuality.

The root word, *radix*, also gives rise to the oft-touted word we hear a lot these days—radical. A radical is not one who goes their separate way, doing their own thing. A radical is one who is so well-grounded with deep roots that they are able to stretch out to the fringes of existence and offer us all a different way of being in the world. We speak of radical hospitality or radical welcome because we claim our deep roots of this life in Christ, and we are willing to claim a radical vision for our lives and for the world.

We don't always agree—politically, theologically, and we have different life experiences—but we care for one another, we pray for one another, and the blush of life is more full because of those relationships. It is our hope that as you reflect on these stories, you might discover how God's graceful activity is revealed in your own life as well, and in those of your group members. ♦

THE RADIX PROJECT PLANNING COMMITTEE

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Please feel free to contact radix@saintmarks.org if you have any questions or concerns along the way. Thank you for your participation.

OVERVIEW FOR SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are designed to gather people of faith in settings that foster trust so that our relationships with God and one another are strengthened. When we meet each other for earnest conversation, sharing, and prayer, we deepen the bonds of affection by which we learn how to love ourselves, each other, and God more fully. In this way, small groups are intentional about providing space for prayerful support and accountability, guided by the One we know as Jesus the Christ.

For our purposes in the Radix Project, we have designed a process for guiding 6–10 people in their season together, designed as six 90-minute sessions, with a plenary gathering before the first session. Each small group gathering is structured to open with prayer, to have time for check-in, scripture reading and reflection, sharing of stories, and check-out with prayer.

SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

OPENING PLENARY

HOPE IN HARD TIMES

Sunday, January 8, 2023
7–8 p.m., online via Zoom only

SESSION 1:

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–11. week of January 8, 2023*

SESSION 2:

PSALM 71. week of January 15, 2023

SESSION 3:

LUKE 2:22–33, 36–38 week of January 22, 2023

SESSION 4:

ISAIAH 40:27–31 week of January 29, 2023

SESSION 5:

REVELATION 21:1–6, 22:1–5. week of February 5, 2023

SESSION 6:

LUKE 24:13–35 week of February 12, 2023

**Sunday groups will start on January 15 and end on February 19.*

RADIX 9: HOPE IN HARD TIMES

The risk with weighty words like “hope,” or “love,” or “faith,” is that they serve as proxy for such an array of human experiences. I love apple pie... I love going to the beach... I love my church... I love my family... and then the Great Commandment: Love God... and love neighbor as self. There is nothing wrong with this—it is the nature of language to be an imprecise undertaking—but it means that getting to the root of what we mean is often more difficult when such variable purposes employ the same word, especially when that word bears sacred purpose at its core.

Such is the nature of “hope.” We can hope for the weather to be sunny, or to score well on a test, but this Radix series is inviting something else, something less wispy and more grounded in the divine promise of something more, something that will, at some point, be seen as a blessing. We call this a theological virtue because it is oriented to God.

As Christians, we are called to be people of hope, even in the face of so many challenges—globally, economically, socially, individually. We look to the scriptures and to our life in community to find inspiration and encouragement for the journey. And we look to God as companion and source of strength and solace. We need not deny the struggles and suffering of life while we search for a buoyant resilience that is nourished by expectant hope. As we practice this hope, we not think that God will swoop in and sweep the struggles all away; but rather that God is stirring in this world with us, and has endowed us with gifts that sustain us until we are primed to see (*really see!*) the brilliant inbreaking of the holy and healing presence of God’s hope in us, for us, and for all creation.

Our scriptures are replete with images of hope as a theological virtue, the sort that opens us to the path before us, and emboldens us to resist the impulse toward cynicism or resignation. The Radix planning team has chosen six passages for your consideration in your weekly gatherings,

but these are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive of scriptural reference to hope. Look for it as you hear other passages in church, or as you read the Bible in your daily meditations. Look for hope, and you will find it frequently. May such hope be a balm for you in these hard times.

ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

In order to grow in trust, it is important for groups to agree to norms for their time together and revisit them periodically as needed. It is important that everyone agree to abide by the same expectations for their time together. Here are some aspects of relational group culture that all groups will want to discuss as they begin their work.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- ◆ What is allowed to be shared outside the group?
- ◆ What may be shared on social media?

RESPECT AND MUTUALITY

- ◆ Let others finish without being interrupted.
- ◆ Resist the temptation to problem-solve.
- ◆ Mutual respect is essential.
- ◆ Give everyone a chance to speak.

LOGISTICS

- ◆ What are expectations about beginning and ending on time?
- ◆ ...about informing others of an expected absence?

ATTENDANCE

- ◆ Be punctual.
- ◆ Commit to regular attendance and participation.

PREPARATION

- ◆ What, if anything, are group members expected to do to prepare for their meetings?

COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

- ◆ What are expectations that each group member commits to pray for the others daily during this time as a small group?

ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Keep your microphone on mute when not speaking.

Take responsibility to practice using the technology ahead of the meeting, and ask for help as needed. Zoom resources are available at *support.zoom.us*

FLOW OF THE SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

A key to the flourishing of small groups is some consistency week to week so folks will know what to expect. A group facilitator will encourage the group to stay on track, but everyone has a part in making that happen. Here is the suggested format for all Radix Project groups which are designed to meet for 90 minutes each week:

GATHERING.	5 minutes
OPEN IN PRAYER	5 minutes
CHECK-IN QUESTION.	10 minutes
SCRIPTURE REFLECTION	20 minutes
GROUP DISCUSSION	30 minutes
CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS.	10 minutes
CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP	10 minutes

IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

Pick one for each week.

- ♦ What image comes to mind when you hear the word “hope”?
- ♦ What is a winter activity that you enjoy?
- ♦ What is a prayer or spiritual practice that you would like to learn more about?
- ♦ How do you spend rainy days?
- ♦ What is a ministry at Saint Mark’s that you would like to learn more about?
- ♦ If you could pick a Seattle neighborhood to explore more, what would it be and why?

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS/CHECK-OUT

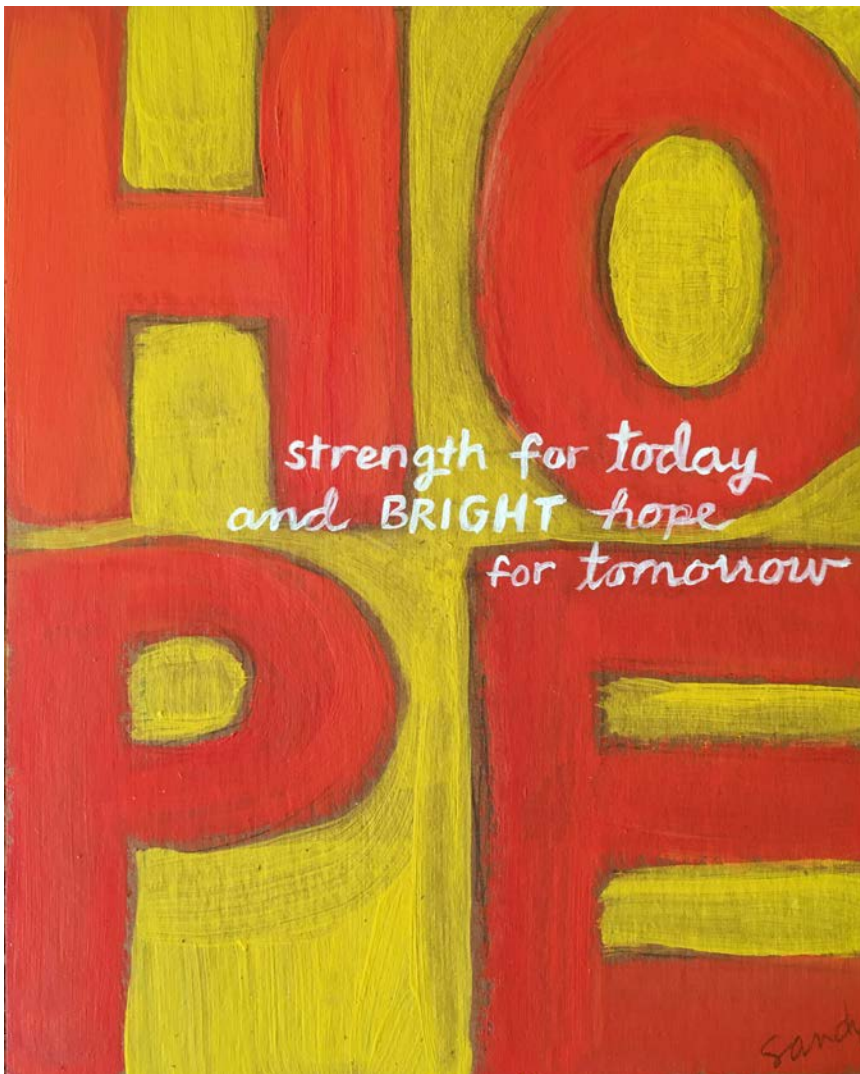
Leading one another in prayer is a responsibility that is meant to be shared among the group—it's not just for the facilitator. Decide how your group will share taking turns with opening and closing prayers. Prayers may be extemporaneous, or sourced from the rich variety of resources, some of which are listed below:

- ◆ Daily Devotions, BCP, p. 137–140
- ◆ Compline, BCP, p. 127
- ◆ A brief hymn, chant, or Taizé prayer
- ◆ A poem that connects to a theme in the scripture selection
- ◆ Lectionary-based Prayers from Vanderbilt Divinity School
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=154>
- ◆ The Book of Common Prayer Online
<https://www.bcponline.org/>
- ◆ The New Zealand Prayer Book Online
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/>
- ◆ The Work of the People
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/be-still>

- ♦ Closing prayer is an opportunity for each member of the group to reflect on the time together, articulating what they learned, and to ask the group to hold them in prayer with special intention. That intention may have arisen in the context of the meeting, or it could be that you are asking for prayers for some prevailing part of your life (e.g., my child has surgery next week, or I am retiring from work, etc.). The important thing is that the prayers of the group gather all those intentions up as the meeting comes to an end, AND that each person commits to holding those prayers through the week, until you meet again.

In addition to including a prayer from one of the above resources, consider the following:

- ♦ The group may choose to go around and allow each person to pray for the person sitting to their right, with the facilitator opening and closing.
- ♦ Alternatively, after the intentions are named, sit in silent prayer, centered on God's mercy and presence.



Hope

painted on cardboard by Sandy Nelson, 2022

Sandy Nelson is an artist, freelance graphic designer and parishioner at Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. She is primarily a painter but she also produces colorful screen prints. She is married to Christopher Brown and their daughter Elsie sings in the Schola choir. This piece, "HOPE," includes words from the hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness*. "It's a poignant reminder that I love, to pray for strength each day and remain hopeful for a bright tomorrow," says Sandy. Learn more at: sandynelsonartist.com

SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES



WEEK 1

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 2:1–11

IF THEN there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you?
What questions do you have about this passage?
2. Many biblical scholars believe that Philippians 2: 6–11 (“Who, though he was in the form... glory of God the Father”) was an early Christian hymn. What line or phrase would you repeat as the chorus? Why?
3. What does the passage tell you about the relationship between humility and community?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time when you put someone else’s interests above your own. What did you learn from the experience?
2. With all the difficulties we face, from climate change to racism to gun violence, how do you feel called to respond?
3. How are you preparing yourself to serve others during these challenging times?



The Annunciation

by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1898)

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937) was an American artist and the first African-American painter to gain international acclaim. Some of his most renowned works are of biblical scenes. St. Paul in this excerpt from Philippians asks us to consider the example of humility, servant-leadership and self-sacrifice set by Christ, and let His example guide us in our daily lives.

In *The Annunciation*, we see another: Mary, the mother of Jesus. Though humble in every imaginable way, Mary receives the angel's news with courage, joy, and faith in God's purpose for her life, even though it immediately puts her future in peril. She says "yes," not to elevate herself, but to manifest the will of God and be a blessing to Jews and gentiles alike.

1. What does Mary's posture in the painting reveal about her character?
2. What does the expression on her face add to your sense of her?
3. Does Tanner's conception of the angel add to the story? How so?

NOTES

WEEK 2

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 71

IN YOU, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
For you, O LORD, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.
I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all day long.
Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.
They say, 'Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver.'
O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
let those who seek to hurt me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.

But I will hope continually,
and will praise you yet more and more.
My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.
I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God,
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and grey hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.
Your power and your righteousness, O God,
reach the high heavens.

You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you?
You who have made me see many troubles and calamities
will revive me again;
from the depths of the earth
you will bring me up again.
You will increase my honour,
and comfort me once again.

I will also praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing praises to you with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.
My lips will shout for joy
when I sing praises to you;
my soul also, which you have rescued.
All day long my tongue will talk of your righteous help,
for those who tried to do me harm
have been put to shame, and disgraced. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this Psalm?
2. Re-read verse 13, “Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed; let those who seek to hurt me be covered with scorn and disgrace.” How do you feel about asking God for those who are “against you” to be shamed, disgraced, scorned and reproached? This isn’t an uncommon “ask” in many Psalms. How do we look at these kinds of requests in light of Matthew 5:43-48, in which Jesus says to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?
3. Why do you think the Psalmist might fear the withdrawal of God’s support “in my old age” ?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. It can be easier sometimes to feel hopeless in hard times than to feel hopeful. Describe an experience in which you were tempted to give in to despair.
 2. In a time when it seems we are bombarded by bad news constantly, what gives you hope?
 3. The theme of God as refuge and strength is one that appears in many Psalms—see especially Psalms 22 and 31. What is a word that describes God for you ?
- Watts painted two versions of *Hope*. He considered this one the better. Many critics in the 19th century disliked it, some because the symbolism isn’t a “traditional” rendering for the concept. However, others liked it and it soon became very popular. Theodore Roosevelt had a copy in his home in New York. Martin Luther King referenced it in his 1962 sermon, “Shattered Dreams.”
1. Even Watts’ contemporaries who disliked the painting liked his use of color. What stands out to you in the painting?
 2. Why do you think Watts depicted Hope with a blindfold, holding a lyre with one string?
 3. Do you find beauty or despair in Watts’ depiction of hope ?



Hope

by George Frederic Watts (1886), from the Tate Collection, London

WEEK 3

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:22–33, 36–38

Simeon and Anna have their hope fulfilled in the infant presented

WHEN the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord’), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.’

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

*“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you?
What questions do you have about this passage?
2. How do you envision these encounters unfolding? How did Simeon and Anna show their joy in the experience of fulfilled hope presented in this little child?
3. What impact do you think these affirmations of Jesus have on his parents?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Can you recall a time when you experienced joy in your hope being fulfilled?
2. All generations and all cultures seem to place great value on sage elders sharing their wisdom, especially as they share their hopes. Why do you think this is so? How is it manifested in our time and place?
3. Is there a hoped-for experience that you await which would prompt a response like Simeon's—i.e., a sense of completion, satisfaction and wholeness that leans into letting go then? How does your faith inform such a hopeful anticipation of the future in which God is working for good?



Simeon Blessing the Christ Child

by Severino Blanco (1980s), Image courtesy of Ayopaya Mission.

- ◀ Severino Blanco is a Bolivian indigenous artist who has taken scriptural scenes and presents them in Andean cultural motifs. In this scene several elements from Quechuan and Aymaran indigenous cultures in South America, making them so human, so alive. Joseph wears poncho and chullo (knitted cap with ear flaps), Mary is barefoot, dressed in red and blue Marian colors and holds an aguayo (sling to hold her child on her back). And Jesus is swaddled in colorful homespun wool with indigenous patterns. The wall behind them bears local traditional elements.

Explore the faces of all four characters here. How do they tell the story which bears so much emotional expression? How does Blanco's use of indigenous elements aid your consideration of the story—ancient yet timeless, locally situated yet universal?

NOTES

WEEK 4

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40:27–31

Why do you say, O Jacob,
and assert, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted,
but those who wait for the LORD
shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you?
What questions do you have about this passage?
2. What does the prophet Isaiah tell us about strength, weariness, and God?
3. Esther Pecota, whose family has long-standing histories at Northwest University, once said, “You either trust God or you don’t.” What does “waiting for the Lord” in verse 31 mean? What does it look like, feel like, sound like?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In verse 27, God asks “Why do you say... my way is hidden from God... my right is disregarded by my God?” What circumstances have you feeling that your way is hidden or your right disregarded by God?
2. How do you respond to these words of God in verses 28–29? “The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.”
3. God promises strength to the weary and power to the weak (verse 29)—what area of your life do you need God’s power and/or need to trade in your weariness for His strength?
4. Share a time, when contrary to your circumstance, someone told you that “it” would be okay, and you “just knew” it would—you believed them. What was it about that person, their words that made you believe? What “God words” are your go-to or what is a meaningful passage you share with others in hard times to be renewed?



Isaiah 40:31

by Patti Hricinak-Sheets

Patti Hricinak-Sheets is from Seattle and spent time in the Pacific Northwest during her education and training at the Northwest College of Art in Tacoma, Washington. Her time in the Northwest has influenced her telling of stories with pencil and brush. She writes:

To think, to pray, to seek Him in silence during a surging storm. I love the gray cold dark sky. I am from Seattle and embrace those northern winds. I see God's boldness in those elements. Contemplating and connection with the The Holy Spirit in those melancholy hours is where I often find my paintings. Sometimes they are abstract and colorful but more often than not, they are surreal and unexplainable and take more hours than I planned. This one started as a girl on a rock and ended up with the open sea of the Puget Sound and a bald eagle. Her feet reflect in the water as a symbol of His reflecting mercy and grace.

How does living in the beauty of the Pacific Northwest provide a source of hope to you?

NOTES

WEEK 5

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 21:1–6, 22: 1–5

THEN I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. ♦

This passage was used in the final session of Radix 8. Because it speaks so powerfully of hope after suffering, we chose to repeat it. If this is a re-reading for you, pay particular attention to what comes up in this reading that's shifted or is new.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you?
What questions do you have about the passage?
2. God's dwelling or location is not above or apart from us; it is intimately among us, so close that God "will wipe away every tear" from our eyes. What does that feel like, to imagine God so close and caring?
3. Revelation contrasts the destructive evil of empire with the profound good of God's realm. "I am making all things new," God says—not some things, or worthy things, but all things. What might change for you if you trusted that completely?
4. The leaves of the tree of life are for "the healing of the nations." What could that healing look like?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The new Jerusalem, the city of God, has a garden at its center—the human world and the natural world flourish together, and God dwells with us there. Describe a place or a time that gave you a glimpse of this.
2. In the new Jerusalem, everything that brings life and health to the community is present, and all that has harmed life and health has been destroyed. What do you see here (at Saint Mark's, in Seattle, in this country and world) that brings life and health? What can we work toward specifically to bring life and health to all?
3. This passage is often read at funerals and has inspired generations who have looked with hope toward what will happen after death. What do you imagine heaven or "dwelling with God" to be like, now or in a time to come?



Arbol de los Nacimientos
by Oscar Soteno (2007)

◀ *Arbol de los Nacimientos* [Tree of births] by Oscar Soteno (born 1970) is an example of the *Arbol de la vida*, or “Tree of Life,” a form of traditional pottery sculptures of central Mexico, most closely associated with the Soteno family in Metepec. These sculptures are made of local red clay and plumilla fibers, brightly painted with polychrome. They have an image of God placed at the top and other images, usually of creation and other Biblical stories, filling in the branches. This example highlights creative objects and elements of Mexican art.

1. What images surprise or delight you in this “Tree of Life”?
2. Consider the idea of a “Tree of Life” holding what we each find to be life-giving. What would your Tree of Life hold?

NOTES

WEEK 6

SCRIPTURE

Luke 24:13–35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. As they approach Emmaus, Jesus walks ahead and the disciples urge the stranger (Jesus) to stay. How do you think he has earned their trust?
3. After Jesus decided to stay for dinner, “he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” What do these words remind you of? Why might this be important in helping the disciples process their grief?
4. Do you notice the imagery of eyes as a sign of recognition? Early in the passage we learn that when the stranger (Jesus) first appeared, the disciples’ eyes were kept from recognizing him and after the breaking of bread their “eyes were opened.” What do you think changed?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Along their seven-mile trek, the disciples talk with each other about everything that happened as they walk. Does talking to others or moving your body help you process something that is uncomfortable or give you encouragement? If so, in what ways and what do you notice after doing so?
2. “But we had hoped” could be the start of many sentences for each of us—we had hoped for a raise in pay to help pay for tuition, a relationship to be repaired, a camping trip without wildfire smoke, to attend a special gathering but tested positive with COVID, and many more... what is a time in which “you had hoped” for something and could not yet see or feel the presence of God?
3. Describe a time in which you have gathered for a meal with people after experiencing a time of sadness, grief, or loneliness. What was the occasion? What did you feel? Did the previous feelings linger, increase, or fade away?

► Ivanka Demchuk is Ukrainian and currently lives and creates art in Lviv, in the western part of the country, distributing her art around the world through Etsy. Imagine ordering an icon from her right now and the journey that this art would make during a time of war. How might this journey connect with the story from the gospel?

Demchuk often uses techniques that allow for experimentation with texture in her work. Do you notice this technique in the icon? If so, what details do you notice? How might hope add dimension in our lives?



Road to Emmaus

Mixed technique icon by Ivanka Demchuk (2022)

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