

1 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: HOPE December 3, 2023

LITANY OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

One: Beloveds, as we gather around this Advent wreath, what shape does our hope take today?

Is it tall and wide, small yet persistent, soft or jagged with its edges?

All: May our hope be round and abundant, spherical like the earth, reminding us how everything is connected:

One: How at some point, even the barren desert bumps up against fecundity.

All: How at some point, what you thought would never end is bookended by the galaxies.

One: How in a timeline not our own, a candle appears in the Valley of Dry Bones,

All: With a voice that prophesizes, "I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live,"

One: and to a heart that aches, "Where you will go, I will go."

All: Come, let us gather around this longing for light, and feel ourselves in the here and now.

(light first candle)

One: Let us inhale the full width of our lungs and exhale a release,

All: expansive enough to let the hope in. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

One: Divine Light, sometimes we mistake hope for a narrowed focus on the future—and forget to be faithful to the present moment,

All: to all that is both offered and required of us right now.

One: By your grace, help us to discern right action and to pay attention to the sacred, even in the midst of discomfort, pain, or inconvenience.

All: May we get in right-relationship with time and our shared discipleship that lasts beyond it. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God Incarnate, through the life of Jesus you showed us that hope is not about a predictable and "sure thing"—but is rather about trust. Hope gives bones to relationships and cannot exist without them. Help us to learn to trust the long nights of our lives, that you are with us regardless of the outcome. May our friendship with you teach us how to repair the harms that are ours to own, in our relationships to ourselves, others, and creation. Through our honest connections, may hope have a place to make its home in us. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

In community, we gather and offer all of our gifts of time, resources, energy, skill, and passion. It is with thanksgiving that we have brought them here today and it is with hope that we imagine their fruits. O Everlasting God, may you bless these offerings with the strings to tether our dreams to a future reality. May they unfold with grace upon grace. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

O God of the Waiting Room, you teach us how creation exists in cycles and in seasons. You've given us the gift of hope, which can spot false prophets in a second and plants the words, "it'll be fine" back into the ground to germinate a deeper root. Yet sometimes it is hard to tell what's even worthy of our hope, and the wholeheartedness it requires. Some days it is easier to light a candle in its name than it is to embody it with our ways of being. Even still, we showed up here today and allowed the practice of ritual to hold hope for us. We spoke the words of Ezekial and Ruth and must remember that we are their future alive and here today. So let us live into the hope of our ancestors and join bone to bone in this community, as One Body in Christ. Amen.

These worship resources were written by the Rev. Elyse Berry, who serves as the Associate for Advocacy and Leadership Development for the Council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) of the United Church of Christ.