

Hope Is Here – Session Two Handout

Hope's Work and the Witnesses: Invitations, Stories, and Resistance

Remember Best Practices!!!

- Listen with curiosity.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Make room for every voice.
- Allow silence when needed.

What is Hope and What is Hope Not?

- Hope is not a mood. It is a force of God drawing us toward beloved community.
- Hope does not float in abstraction. It comes to us embodied, storied, witnessed. Not a feeling, but God at work in our world.
- Hope does not merely comfort. It summons.
- Hope interrupts predictable scripts.

Beloved Community (Reminder)

- Beloved community is God's horizon for the world.
- It is a way of life shaped by justice, mercy, reconciliation, and shared flourishing.
- It is not sentimental harmony, but Spirit-shaped life together rooted in love.
- Hope draws us toward this reality, even when we cannot yet see its fullness.

Invitations

- Invitations can be life-changing.
- Some invitations call us deeper into spiritual practices that foster personal transformation.
- Others invite us into justice, repair, and a fuller vision of beloved community.
- Both kinds of invitations foster hope, reshape who we are, and help us participate in God's work in the world.

Biblical Witnesses of Hope's Invitation

- Abram leaving home.
- Mary saying yes.
- Disciples dropping their nets.

In each case, hope did not soothe. Hope disrupted. Hope called them beyond the familiar into trust.

The Work of Hope

- We become a people of hope through stories and through a 'cloud of witnesses.'
- Hope is sustained not only in extraordinary moments, but in ordinary days.
- The lives of others steady us. Their courage enlarges our imagination. Their faithfulness reminds us that hope has a history.

Naming Our Witnesses

Who has embodied hope for you?

These witnesses may be people you know personally, ancestors in faith, writers, activists, mentors, or quiet saints whose names are not widely known. Hope often arrives through ordinary people who choose trust over fear.

Why We Resist Hope

- Hope can threaten what feels predictable or safe.
- We may resist hope because we fear disappointment, suffering, change, or losing control.
- Hope asks us to loosen our grip on familiar scripts. It invites us into a future we do not manage.

Group Discussion/Personal Reflection

This chapter illustrates how invitations take us to experiences of beloved community and personal transformation. Invitations indicate efforts to establish or sustain relationships. We are invited to a place or event where we are welcomed. Arriving, we often discover our hearts are exposed to deeper meanings of hospitality, compassion, and purpose than we anticipated. We are enlivened to realities and relationships that enliven us to latent yearnings of our hearts. We leave such places, but the experiences of these places and relationships continue with us. An increased sense of hope's presence continues with us. Hope embraces us through invitations.

Our lives are inundated with invitations. Invitations from our jobs, our faith communities, the array of nonprofit organizations we support, friends, people we've just met, neighborhood organizations, businesses promising to improve our lives. We cannot accept all of them. We should not. Trying to be everywhere diminishes genuine involvement anywhere. What we can do is keep our hearts open to the work that hope does through invitations. For hope is relentless in extending invitations to be enlivened to life and experiences of beloved community.

Smith, Jr., Luther E.. Hope Is Here!: Spiritual Practices for Pursuing Justice and Beloved Community (p. 48). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

What have been life changing invitations for you?

Reflecting on the importance of the stories we tell ourselves and others, what are the stories you tell in your family? Are you looking for hope and sharing that with others?

Where do you see hope embodied in someone's life right now?

What makes hope feel risky for you?

Most often, discussions about hope relate to suffering and crisis—the desperation from being in “desolate pit” and “miry bog” (Ps. 40) realities. However, the need for hope is not limited to desperate times. Crisis amplifies the need, but hope is essential to living the ordinary days. A drowning man desperately gasping for breath, needed the air just as much when he lived his days in routine. His lungs deprived of air intensify his desperation, but his need to breathe was no less necessary when times were tranquil. Likewise, hope sustains, even when we are unaware of our dependence on it. Hope is essential regardless of circumstances.

Smith, Jr. , Luther E.. Hope Is Here!: Spiritual Practices for Pursuing Justice and Beloved Community (p. 59). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Practice for This Week

Create/reflect on your own 'cloud of witnesses' list. Who is speaking into your life and who is missing?

Include diversity of age, background, and perspective.

Include people who challenge as well as comfort you.

Include those who model quiet endurance as well as bold courage.

Notice what their lives teach you about hope.

Hope is not fragile optimism. It is God's persistent work in and through ordinary people. And it keeps summoning us forward.