

the practice of hope

resources and reflections,
written by members of the corrymeela community
for corrymeela sunday: march 13, 2016

following the readings from the common lectionary:

isaiah 43:16-21

psalm 126

philippians 3:4-14

john 12:1-8

the
corrymeela[✦]
community

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An Invitation: 'We were like those who dream.'

Corrymeela was founded in 1965 as a place of peace amidst growing tensions of identity, politics, religion and belonging. While Northern Ireland of today has changed so much, we recognise in our own region, and in our wide world the ongoing tensions of these foundational issues: identity, politics, religion and belonging.

Corrymeela began as a dream. Arising out of experiences of being a prisoner of war, our founder, Ray Davey, saw that places of conflict needed places of friendship. He had a hope of a place of beauty where important conversations could happen. Fifty years later, we live in the practice of this hope.

Each year we join with parishes, cathedrals, prayer groups, churches and people of faith in prayer for ourselves and our world.

Today on Corrymeela Sunday we invite you to dream, to be still and connect with your heart, your desires which may be deeply hidden. To take a risk and dare to dream for yourself; someone you love; or for the world.

This is not just the practice of positive thinking or chasing glitter. This is the practice of hope, of belief, expectation and often waiting.

The practice of hope may be sown in tears, fear or frustration, unable to imagine a future harvest of joy or laughter. To connect with your unique desires will make you vulnerable to yourself and if the aspirations are proclaimed, vulnerable to the world. But in the words of Brené Brown 'Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change'.

To practice hope, and in doing so proclaim a dream, it becomes a possibility to live towards. As Jim Wallis states: 'Hope is the most important thing the faith community has to give the world and to social movements of change'.

What starts as a fragile hope in the silence of your heart, can be a step towards a new understanding, a new way of being for ourselves or our communities. May we be those who dare to practice hope and those who listen and encourage each other to dream.

Ruth Gray

Introduction: 'The Practice of Hope'

Theologians are into words. Words really excite us. If you ask a theologian what his or her favourite word is, nine times out of ten, I suspect, they'll answer immediately...(Or they'll struggle to pick just one...) One of my favourite words is 'praxis'. It's Greek so, in actual fact, I should say that one of my favourite words is 'πρᾶξις'...

'Praxis' is not one thing; it combines elements of noun and verb. 'Praxis' is a dynamic word, a word that is filled with thinking, discussing, and doing. 'Praxis' describes a movement, a cycle. It describes the movement from reflection to action- and of action to reflection... It is about thinking about what you are doing, and then the action of doing it, and then the thought about what you did, which leads to new action, modified by the thought, And on and on...

This is 'praxis': the dynamic engagement of reflection and action towards a transformation. 'Praxis' keeps us from just sitting around talking about something, 'having a conversation' about an issue. If we're not careful, we can simply 'reflect' forever;

'Praxis' is the moment of saying, 'how do we begin to do what we're talking about?'

Likewise, 'praxis' keeps us from simply 'working', whether or not anything's being particularly accomplished. If we're not careful, 'doing what we do' can just take over;

'Praxis' is the moment of saying, 'what is getting done? How might we work better?' 'Praxis' is why 'the practice of hope' is so fascinating; Hope is the raw material of 'praxis'.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion', says the Psalmist, 'we were like those who dream'...When we dream- when we hope- we begin a 'praxis'. Hope is the reflection, tightly bound to action.

The dream is the instigating moment of social transformation- the way things are transforming into the way things should be. The Hebrews understood God to be a God of 'praxis'; The prophet speaks for God, 'I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (IS. 43:19)'God is in the ancient traditions... but never confined by them.

Mary, the friend of Jesus, lavishly blesses him with a costly perfume, and Judas takes it upon himself to begin a reflection on the variable merits of worship expenditure versus philanthropy. Jesus stops him; He seems to say, 'reflect on socio-economic conditions another time; this is a moment of acting, and we stand on holy ground'...And St. Paul refuses to rest on the spiritualities of the past; 'I press on towards the goal', he says. We all press on. 'Praxis' is the pressing...

The goal- the 'prize'- is the calling; 'the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil 3:14) 'Praxis' is the hope of the goal... and it *is* the goal. For when our communities are called together, hope together, dream together, reflect together, and act together, we are transformed. And through our transformation, our world is transformed. This is 'the Practice of Hope'.

Jon Hatch

Art ideas: Collaging on hope

Today's Bible passages are full of imagery, including wilderness, water, sowing and reaping, restoration, and resurrection.

You might want to reflect further on these, and one way is with a Mood Board, which is a form of collaging.

You will need:

- Glossy magazines, such as Sunday supplements or National Geographic
- Pritt stick
- Scissors
- A piece of large card, such as Daler Board.

Re-read the four passages: Isaiah 43:16-21, Psalm 126, Philippians 3:4-14, John 12:1-8 and think about the imagery.

What do the readings make you think of?

Start looking through the magazines and choose images and headlines that jump out at you. Pull them out and put them to the side. If there's an image you want but can't find, you can always print one off the internet.

After about half an hour, you should have a pile of pages to trim and crop. Arrange them on the board until you are happy – you can always go back to the magazines if you don't have the right pictures or your thoughts take you a whole other direction.

Once you're happy with the final arrangement, use the Pritt stick to attach them to the card.

Take five minutes, perhaps using the timer on your phone, to write a response or story to go with your mood board.

Joanne Boal

Isaiah 43: A way out of no way.

Isaiah 43: 16 – 21

Corrymeela's founder Ray Davey said that 'If we Christians have nothing to say about reconciliation we have nothing to say.' I believe that is true of hope too. If we Christians have nothing to say about hope, we have nothing to say.

If we are attentive, to the world, to the countries and communities, neighbourhoods, and families in which we live, we will, I believe, feel there is a life and death urgency attached to how we 'practice' hope. The threats in these places come in many forms but I would suggest that they can be reduced to two: violence and despair.

Violence is easy to find and imagine if we are attentive; especially when it is obvious in the rubble of Syrian cities, or seemingly intractable conflicts in other parts of the world. And violence is also easy to find if we look a bit harder, at pervasive gender based violence of men against women, or the ongoing violence most of us bear some responsibility for perpetrating against the planet. To give one example, violence, including gender based violence, is endemic to our addiction to the resources that open up our mobile phone screens and ipads, which in turn are dependent on minerals like Coltan from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although the systems that fuel violence and conflict are much bigger than us alone, we are not better than, or apart from them.

Whilst 'violence' is easy to find and imagine if we are attentive, 'despair' may need more of an explanation. Despair is partly what paralyzes us from trying to do *anything* because we can't do *everything*. Action, we may fear, is useless in the face of such enormous and complex global problems. I spent many years working with church people on global poverty issues with Christian Aid. While I was there, we did research on what keeps people from working for justice in the world. We found some answers we expected, and some surprises. Some people don't care about poverty and injustice, that is true. But some people cared deeply. They didn't act because they were paralysed by a sense of despair, overwhelmed by the vast scale of poverty, and violence and environmental destruction. We tried to address that through designing materials that didn't guilt people into action, but instead tried to explore how God's grace could be pulling us into God's will for the world he loves so much.

We discovered something about prayer and the practice of hope. The opposite of prayer is not action. The opposite of prayer is despair.

I would propose that the person of faith who set down the words in Isaiah, chapter 43 knew this. These words are written from the rubble, in this case of Jerusalem, after the capitol had been sacked, the people forced into exile, accompanied by multiple forms of humiliation, defeat and unspeakable violence. These words are the result of the practice of finding a 'way out of no way,' in the words of African American gospel songs. Finding 'a way out of no way' might sum up the practice of hope. What else, indeed, is (v. 16) 'a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters'....or this: 'a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert (vv 19, 20)? These are words that breathe defiance by expressing hope for the future when there appeared to be little chance of a future. They have an added significance for us as we contemplate the need for the renewal of the planet and the life giving elements in it. They are hopeful words, comforting words, even defiant words. They are inspired by faith in God's action in renewing the world and our response. When violence is unspeakable, we can reach back for the old words, and the prophet walks with

us, and comforts us again: 'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?'

How do we find this 'way out of no way'? I would like to suggest three features that I believe characterise a practice of hope.

First: Hope requires a steady gaze. The practice of hope must start with measured, analytical, steady gaze at the world, the reality of violence, its causes and consequences. Make no mistake: unless we squarely face questions of life and death, we don't really have a word of hope to offer.

Second: Hope requires a decision. Hope is freely available but it requires us to make a decision. Sometimes it is an act of defiance. My Methodist friend, the poet Janet Morley noticed that we take this decision every time we conduct a funeral service in the Presbyterian tradition. "You call it 'A Service of Witness to the Resurrection,' she said. 'In the face of death, that is an act of defiance. Sometimes in the teeth of the evidence.'" Hope is a decision. It can be an act of defiance.

Third: To hope is an action verb. It goes straight through the middle of despair and is pulled into God's will for the world God loves so much. Hope is dynamic, engaging and attentive. Hope helps us to focus on what we can do (not what we *cannot* do; and not what we can *think*).

I have said that hope is freely available, only requiring a decision. But although it is freely available, it is not free, not glib, and does not come cheap. If you find hope easy, you have not been paying attention. The practice of hope might begin, respectfully, carefully, after you have sat with someone long enough, listening closely. Or walked with someone who is bearing the weight of injustice and violence. Or sometimes, in ways we don't understand, it finds a place to grow where people have been rendered speechless by unspeakable violence.

Hope starts by looking steadily at reality. It goes straight through the middle of despair. Then it is pulled into God's will for the world God loves so much. Hope is freely available, but it does not come cheap. There is so much more that could be said. Hope may come at a cost, and should come at a cost. It should never be glib or cheap. But I would propose that as costly as hope can be, despair costs more. Despair is the luxury we can't afford.

If we are thinking of a practice of hope that starts in the rubble, we might remember, for example, that Corrymeela started there too: in a place where hope for the future of the world as we know it, was lost. We stand in the tradition of Ray Davey, who started a new chapter of his life when he stood in the rubble of the Allied bombing Dresden in Germany in World War II. He looked around him with a steady gaze and saw humiliation, defeat and unspeakable violence. He made a decision to hope. He went on to show hope as an action verb, living a mighty life, powered by a mighty love, a love as strong as death. To use words we affirm in our community statement of commitment, by his example, we see what it meant to live in the reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the promise of life.

Corrymeela is still practicing hope. During Corrymeela Sunday, you are invited to reflect on situations where you face a challenge in the practice of hope, finding 'a way out of no way.'

We pray you will find the comfort, and the defiance of the old words of Isaiah an invitation to practice hope in the places you are, with the people around you.

- We invite you to name those places, and those people now, in silence.
- We invite you to you consider ways in which you will practice hope in the coming week. ...
- We invite you share any thoughts you have had with the person next to you, [or 'aloud,' in plenary, if the leader wishes].

Leader: After you facilitate sharing in some appropriate way, close with prayers. See page 14, 15, 17 or 23 for some suggestions of prayers.

Rebecca Dudley

Isaiah 43: Finding the Promised Land in the Desert

*“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old **See** I am about to do something new! **Now** it springs forth. Do you not perceive it? “I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert”*

When I was young I thought that I could have anything I wanted by bringing people around to my will and way of thinking. In the war between what I wanted and what I needed, I was a true master in the use of perseverance, stealth and persuasion. Even my prayers were a litany of pleading and bargaining. I believed that if I prayed long enough, worked hard enough and behaved well enough, I would wake up some day free of all sorrow and live happily ever after!

Now that I'm an adult, I'd love to say that I've left that fairy tale version of life behind me but old habits are hard to shake. These days however, I'm more likely to be stopped in my tracks by some unexpected word or encounter that brings me to my senses. In those moments, even if I cannot yet see, I'm able to hear the still small voice of God whispering the promise of something new in my heart.

Encountering life's sadness as an adult once made me wonder how my mother withstood the challenges and sorrows that had landed at her front door. When I asked she said simply *“I just pray for coping skills and in God's own good time everything passes”*. As the years pass, like it or not, I am becoming more and more like my mother! My own hope now is not found in my will, desires or dreams. It doesn't rest in my ability to conquer adversity or control life. I am more shaped by the possibilities I see than by the conditions or circumstances that surround me. Living life in the light of God's promises rather than in the shadow of past experiences, I see that through the slow work of God I am transforming into a woman of hope. I no longer have to feel hope to know it. Like the promise of a river flowing through the desert, I can live from the possibility of hope even in the deepest despair.

Beyond the magical thinking of childhood, hope is a mystery and a miracle given to us through the practice of surrender. It becomes visible through our willingness to welcome and accept life just as it is, without needing to control, change, fix or manipulate it. It is an unwavering commitment to 'Letting Go', 'Letting Be' and 'Letting Come' moment by moment. Hope is saying 'Yes' in blind faith to this journey of life that brings us into the heart of our own humanity and step by faltering step we find our way through the wilderness.

In the Irish language there is a phrase *‘As Seo Amach’*. It translates as *‘from here on out’*. I love that way of speaking the future. So, it seems, did St. Paul who was committed to *“forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”*. Philippians 3:13

Today as I reflect on the spaces and places throughout our world paralysed by despair, fear and hopelessness, hope occurs to me simply as the willingness to show up and do what there is to do. It's the miracle of choosing to keep on, keeping on no matter what. When there is no map all that remain are Faith, Hope and Love made visible in our willingness to be guided home to the 'Promised Land' by the light of a faraway star and the intimate whisper of LOVE in our hearts.

“May those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves”. Psalm 126: 6

Maria Garvey

Isaiah 43: Britain and Ireland Remembering our pasts.

“army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick”

Reflection

The people of Judah had suffered, been captive and were under the control of a conquering force - Babylon. Many were ready to give up and had lost hope. Isaiah speaks to them. He reminds them of God's power over both nature and the human warriors and armies. The similarity between Isaiah 43:16-17 and the description of the dramatic rescue of the people of Israel at the sea in Exodus 14 and 15 suggest that the prophet is invoking the collective memory of being an abused people.

Living in Northern Ireland and being English I have long been aware of the collective memory of the 'Irish' about the pain and terrible history of the English domination and 'capture' of many traditionally Irish lands. This has led to a deep feeling in me to have to apologise for being English. My sensitivity is not shared by most of my friends and relations. This fascinates me – why do some people feel a collective guilt and others don't? Is it easier to feel a sense of collective injustice than to feel the collective guilt?

What do you think about collective memory and experiences?

If they are collective – where does confession and forgiveness fit?

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.

It is fascinating that the prophet, having made such an effort to invoke memories from the past now tells them: “do not remember the former things or the things of old”. This is so completely unexpected when he was just speaking favourably of the power of God over the past. But it is an effective way to engage with the people to use their imagination about how the future might be and how the past might inform that future – not to hold them back and say 'this is how it is'. I know that I try very hard to forget certain events and experiences from my past and as an act of will I manage to for a while but then something happens that takes me back to the original feelings, event or memory.

How easy is it to forget the past? What things help us/ make us remember? [Refer to senses, feelings and memories]

Is it possible to forget about the past?

Do we have experiences to share when the past has informed and helped the present or future?

I will make a way in the wilderness

Isaiah now begins to help the people imagine a new future. The images seem to bring together ideas from the past – water in the desert links to Exodus again - as well as new ways that God will work to bring new life to the desert places. The wilderness will provide hope and life again.

I am always challenged and inspired if rather daunted by the idea of the wilderness. I have many times in my life when I have felt in a wilderness – not least as I was turned down for ordination 3 years ago. I felt rejected and unwanted by God and all at sea. And then as I worked through those feelings and expected to feel better – I actually started to feel angry and lost. I moved from a feeling of sailing alone to one of being lost in a desert. The latter feeling far more lonely and frightening for some reason, perhaps because at sea I was still moving forward – in the desert I felt like I had ground to a halt. We are told ‘Do not remember’ and yet we are reminded of the things God has done. The words from Isaiah really speak of trust and a new vision of life and God’s hand at work and yet refer to repeating patterns and others experiences too.

Think of a ‘wilderness experience that you have had [large or small] and what words would you use to describe it?

Did anything bring you comfort? What did you need in the most difficult times? What small [maybe tiny] signs of hope did you see/feel? If you have not had a wilderness experience - what do you think might lead to a feeling of hopelessness and desolation?

How do you think past experiences might positively inform the future?

Katie Sparham Brown

Poetry: Arising

arising

there is light
so brilliantly present
it reaches forever
beyond forever

what can we know?

we are here for such a short time

and yet we discover
ancient light
reaching back forever
in each other

sometimes

in those who stay open to
arising
as much as they can

in those who carry
even the smallest speck
of hope to try

in those who trust
to see the light
of ages
in your own eyes

who look, and look, and look
until the christ in them
meets the christ in you

and all is risen
dawned and dancing
again

stroangibbah, donegal
22 feb 09

Colleen D. Brown

Philippians 3: Liturgy of response.

One voice: In my power, prowess, people skills or prose?

All voices: No.

In my abilities, achievements, ideas and ambitions?

All voices: No.

One voice: In my knowledge, my longevity, my reputation, my career?

All voices: No.

One voice: In my confidence?

All voices: No.

One voice: In my righteousness?

All voices: No.

One voice: In knowing God made human?

All voices: Yes.

One voice: In being known, being gathered, being loved by God made human?

All voices: Yes.

One voice: In being perfect?

All voices: No.

One voice: In being right?

All voices: Occasionally.

One voice: In being humble?

All voices: Sometimes.

One voice: In needing to practice hope?

All voices: Always.

One voice: In being finished?

All voices: Not a chance.

One voice: In being immune to sorrow?

All voices: No.

One voice: Confidence in being human, made in the image of God, in joy, in sorrow, in life, in death, in a body, in courage, in vulnerability, in generosity, in hope, in a body like the body that God took, being made like us.

All voices: Yes. Amen. Yes.

Pádraig Ó Tuama

Prayer: A prayer of hope based on Isaiah 43; 16 – 21.

Sovereign Lord, God of narrative, purpose and plan,
Who makes a way for hope and paves a path for peace,
Hear the cry of your thirsty people.

Lord of the past,

We celebrate your infinite resources, your irresistible power and your matchless victory.
Stay the hands of the hope-stealers, raise us up a generation of hope-fuelled dreamers.
Grant us a hope galvanised by a backward look toward you.

Response Make a way for hope to grow.
 Shape a path for hope to flow.

Lord of the present,

Help us to step from the shadows of our past, refusing to focus on the failures of our history.
Inspire us with the anticipation of new beginnings, enabling a creative kaleidoscope of change.
Grant us a hope renewed by an optimistic perspective.

Response Make a way for hope to grow.
 Shape a path for hope to flow.

Lord of the future,

May we grasp that your hope is already among and within us.
Release in us the spirit of the pioneer that we might walk in your way.
Instil in us a love for life and liberty.
Grant us a hope tempered by a synergy of Word and Spirit.

Response Make a way for hope to grow.
 Shape a path for hope to flow.

Lord of this moment,

Water our wilderness, quench our dryness,
Call forth our godliness, birth in us hopefulness.

May our hope be made visible by incarnation and immanence.
That we might declare your praise among all your people.

Amen.

Gordon McDade

Prayer: A prayer in light of the Psalm 126

Psalm 126:5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy

Let us pray.
God of the nations,
you have done great things for us and so
we bring our thanks and praise.
Hear us as we offer our prayers for the world you love:

May those who sow in tears:
Reap with shouts of joy.

We pray for the Middle East,
birthplace of Abraham and Sarah,
of Moses and Muhammad, Mary and Jesus,
cradle of our faith and the faiths of others.

for those whose communities are torn apart by conflict,
for those who journey, hopeful of a better future,
for those who wield the weapons of war ...

Silence

May those who sow in tears:
Reap with shouts of joy.

We pray for poor and the vulnerable,
those who pay the daily price of greed and injustice
yet will be first in the Kingdom of God.

for those who struggle to feed their children today,
for those who sacrifice themselves in the service of others,
for those who die today and whose names are known only to God ...

Silence

May those who sow in tears:
Reap with shouts of joy.

We pray for peace-makers and reconcilers,
children of the God of peace,
who hold within themselves such treasure in fragile jars.

for the Corrymeela Community, its members and workers,
for the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross
for ourselves in the ministry to which we have been called ...

Silence

May those who sow in tears:
Reap with shouts of joy.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Author and Perfecter of Faith,
renew our vision,
strengthen our resolve,
and enflame our hearts,
that we may leave what is behind
and strain towards the goal
you have set before us;
and join our prayers with the
prayer of the whole Church,
as we say together:

Our Father

Reflection

Since I took up gardening, the Bible has come alive in a new way. All those horticultural and agricultural metaphors have been invested with a new depth they previously lacked. Sowing and reaping appear more than once in the Hebrew Bible and the stories of Jesus and those terms would have been heard by people who had dirt under their fingernails. They would have known, as I have come to see, that the act of sowing is the practice of hope. Not only does the sower have no control over the weather conditions, but in a region like the Middle East, there is no guarantee that the grower will be around long enough to reap what has been sown. Sowing seeds is about investing hope in the future, trusting in the harvest. For the Psalmist, release from captivity and return from exile were realities to be celebrated; for modern day Syrians, Iraqis and Kurds, their tears must water the seedbeds of Aleppo and Deraa.

The vocation of the peace-maker is to sow where the ground is rocky and dry. It is to risk wasting seeds knowing that the harvest may be delayed in coming or trampled underfoot by advancing armies. It finds its rationale, not in risk assessments or cost-benefit analyses, but in the faithfulness of God. In sure and certain hope, not of a predictable or controllable future, but in an unshakeable goal and vision: 'The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.' (ML King)

Questions for reflection

What experiences have you had of having to 'sow in tears'?

What experiences have you had of 'reaping in shouts of joy'?

What sustains your hope in peace-making/building when the going is tough?

Sam McBratney

Prayers of Gathering from Psalm 126

Thank you Lord, for all the great things you have done for us. We rejoice in your generosity and in your abundant love for us. Equip us to love abundantly in return and to daily rejoice in love given and received.

Response: Gather us in, oh God. Gather us in.

We acknowledge your delight in us. May we delight also in you and relax into the safety of your embracing presence and savour the pleasure of your smile.

Response: Gather us in, oh God. Gather us in.

When times are tough fill us with your Holy Spirit and enable us to keep our hearts up, to be expectant of and prepared to see wonderful things

Response: Gather us in, oh God. Gather us in.

When we emerge from times of trouble and stress grant us renewed energy, joy and laughter

Response: Gather us in, oh God. Gather us in.

Lord God, help us to move on from the past, to live in the present, open to the potential of the future as we focus on You and your will for us and our community

Response: Gather us in, oh God. Gather us in.

Desney Cromey

Gospel: Hope in Community

The meeting at the home of Lazarus,, Martha and Mary is a time for the small community of Jesus and his followers to rest and eat together. This is how we all refresh ourselves in community. We meet, we have a meal together, we talk and we enjoy being together. Whether in families, between friends, in church, in community.

Community is not always a very refreshing place – sometimes it is full of tension, conflict and disagreement. This time Mary’s action in anointing Jesus feet is a moment of loveliness and intimacy. Not many words are spoken but the action is very intimate and it brought tensions to the surface. Judas is thinking and plotting something very different and the Jews are scheming. There is tension and conflict, and disagreement is present.

Story

My experience in the Corrymeela community has been one of refreshment and conflict and hope. I remember when a particularly difficult topic was tearing us apart with disagreement. Strong feelings were being expressed. We were sitting in the Croí — the chapel space at Corrymeela, a word meaning “heart”. I could not bear the conflict and the tears started to stream. Another member put an arm around me and said ‘it is OK to cry’. Conflict is difficult and brings up strong fears and hurt feelings in most of us or sometimes the feelings of being scapegoated.

The leader of the group eventually drew the discussion to a close. We had no time left and not much time to do any ‘conflict resolution exercises’. He asked us all to sit in silence and prayer to reflect on what had just happened. This became a moment of refreshment and hope for me and others - also surprise at how the silence brought healing.

We recognised our confusion, tension, conflict, and in acknowledging it found ourselves on the road to becoming again a community We became aware of the presence of Jesus the reconciler in our midst. It did not solve the argument but drew us together again to a place of love and forgiveness. We belonged to each other in a community of Hope and that was the way we would walk forward together again.

If you wish, you might want to discuss the following questions in small groups:

Who did you identify with in the story - Mary, Jesus, Judas, Jews, others looking on?

What was an experience of conflict in your community (family/church/work/community)

Is there a place for silence in church/community groups when we just ‘stop talking’.

SONG Don’t be afraid, my love is stronger 1995 WGRG, Iona “Come all you people”

HYMN Great God, your love has called us here Brian Wren

SONG “Judas and Mary” from Sydney Carter.

ACTION You may wish to do some simple mime to the Sydney Carter song.

Joyce Williams

Gospel: Explorations about the characters in John 12.

What does Martha's role symbolise?

What does Mary's role symbolise?

Do you feel closer to Mary or to Martha?

What do you think would have happened next if you were Mary?

What might have happened next if you were Martha?

Bríd Cullen

Group discussion on the journey of faith

Both Psalm 126 and the passage from Isaiah speak to me of the undulating movement of our faith journeys although maybe 'undulating' is too gentle a word to encompass some of the peaks and valleys we sometimes experience! It's also not just our faith journeys that this applies to but also our lives in general. The Psalmist looks back to, 'When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,' and asks for God to do the same again in the present. What has happened?

It's also interesting that the Psalmist says, in remembering those times, that, 'The Lord has done great things for us,' and that other nations had noticed and said, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' It seems that it's just as important to Israel that others recognise God's work as well as they themselves do. It is, after all, God's over-arching plan both then and now that God's people live the kingdom and others are drawn to what they see. Israel had been living that reality, fulfilling that plan and flourishing. What had happened? Whatever it was they were in need of hope.

There are two particular phrases that strike me as I read the Psalm in relation to hope. The first is, '...we were like those who dream.' It is a wonderful image of those who are not weighed down by worry, fear, pain, poverty or loss - in those situations life feels crushing, our world seems to narrow and shrink and we don't really think about the future - but an image of those who can laugh and praise and whose minds are free to believe and plan and dream of great things for themselves and others.

The other phrase is one I find incredibly powerful: 'Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing...' This is the practice of hope distilled down to its most basic element. Although this hope may not be recognised or understood, through our weeping we get up and on with life, we go out and sow our seed, not being sure of the outcome, not even sure if it's worth it. I have been one who has wept and it's only recently I've understood that getting up each morning is a practice of hope, even though there are no feelings of hope and no looking forward to tomorrow let alone dreaming of a better future - yet. That is to come, with the presence and comfort and workings of God.

Isaiah helps us here: 'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?' This is what we have been promised. Maybe it's the perception that's key here. Maybe the practice of hope is connected to the practice of perceiving and the practice of perceiving is nurtured through stillness: sitting, settling, quietening, breathing, opening, asking for the grace to see the work God is doing in our lives, expressing gratitude. Through this seeds of hope and faith begin to grow, our soul begins to waken and maybe we dare to begin to dream.

Group questions for reflection on Psalm 126

Look back at your faith journey over the recent past. Can you track its undulating movement or peaks and troughs? Where can you say, 'The Lord has done great things for me?' Does this give you hope?

For what do you dream? Tell a loving and listening God. Can you share this with anyone who can draw these dreams out of you and help make them a reality?

Whether you are in a place where you are weeping or laughing, what seeds are you taking out each day to sow?

Perhaps you may enjoy reading "**What to Remember When Waking**" by David Whyte found in ***The House of Belonging***, Many Rivers Press.

Rachel Foley

Story: Hope in the darkness - a reflection on grief.

Darkness fell on our family in August 2014, when Jo's sister Louise was diagnosed with chondrosarcoma in her right hip just after her 41st birthday, a slow-growing cancer that she had mistaken for a sports injury, and which usually takes people in their 20s and 30s.

So many questions. Why Louise? Why her husband Derek and son Tom? Why Jo's parents should have to bury their own daughter? Why the healthiest one in the family who loved running through the Pentland hills? Why the faithful minister who loved and was loved so much by her congregation in Scotland?

Part of the answer came in DVDs which Louise recorded for friends and family shortly after she became ill, and which we watched for the first time just before her funeral in February 2015. She asked us to run for her, to dance for her and to think of her.

Louise wanted us to learn from her. To remember her with fondness, certainly to be sorry she was no longer with us, even though she knew her security was in Jesus, but to live. To learn from her humility and her love for family, friends, congregation and Jesus.

In the here and now, we are still in the darkness, and all we can see by the light of the candles we hold is the wilderness of not understanding and grief.

Our hope is that we will see the rivers flow across the desert to bring life again. We live for the day when we will see the fruit of the life of a woman whose memorial service attracted 1,200 mourners, of people who will say that Louise helped them on their journey with God.

But in the meantime, we wait in the darkness, with a ready supply of friends with matches to keep the candles alight – and more than that, we do not wait alone. On the darkest day, in the loneliest night, when everything is lost, we know this one thing deep within. We are never alone, because the Holy Spirit, our comforter and guide, is with us. Our heavenly Father doesn't promise to protect us from heartbreak, cancer and evil, he walks with us through it all – and knowing that makes all the difference.

Andy Boal

Prayer: A prayer for Courage.

Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí of all being.

We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called
to live lives of courage, love
and reconciliation
in the ordinary and extraordinary moments
of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.
May we learn today.
May we love today.
Amen.

From the Corrymeela community's daily liturgy

Contributors:

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“We were like those who dream” was contributed by Ruth Gray. Ruth is a dentist working in the N. Ireland prisons. She tours the Camper Van of Dreams round festivals, schools and hard places, with her husband Simon and three boys Killian, Finnian and Shay. They have been members of Corrymeela since 2015.

The Practice of Hope was contributed by Jon Hatch. Jon is a Corrymeela member who works as a theologian, educator, and activist.

The Collage of hope was contributed by Joanne Boal. Joanne first volunteered for Corrymeela in 1994. Later becoming a Corrymeela staff member and a member of the community. She is now an Art Therapist for a local cancer charity in Belfast where she lives with her husband and fellow Corrymeela Community member Andy.

A Way out of No Way was contributed by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Dudley. Rebecca does human rights based research and advocacy on gender based violence against women, and supports her local Presbyterian church. She recently moved to New Zealand from Northern Ireland, where she had lived in Belfast. She has been a member of Corrymeela since 2006.

Finding the promised land in the desert was contributed by Maria Garvey. Maria originally from Cork, now lives in Belfast where she works as a consultant, facilitator and retreat leader. She been a friend to Corrymeela and a provisional member since 2015.

“Britain and Ireland: remembering our pasts” was contributed by Katie Sparham Brown a member of Corrymeela since 1993 when she worked as the schools worker. Now a schools counsellor and student mental health tutor, she is married with two daughters, three step-daughters and four step grandchildren. Originally from the North of England Katie has lived in Northern Ireland for the past 18 years.

The poem “Arising” was contributed by Colleen D. Brown. Colleen, originally from the United States, is a Corrymeela community member is originally from San Francisco. She is a trained therapist, spiritual director and facilitator who works with people facing trauma and bereavement. She lives with her family in Dublin.

The liturgy of response was contributed by Pádraig Ó Tuama. Pádraig is from Cork, and is the leader of the Corrymeela Community.

The Prayer of Hope was contributed by Gordon McDade. Gordon, originally from Belfast, now living in Hillsborough where he works as a coach, spiritual director and community planter. He’s been member of Corrymeela since 2013.

“A prayer in light of Psalm 126” was contributed by Sam McBratney. Sam, originally from Newtownards, Co Down, is now based at the Queen’s Foundation in Birmingham where he is Director of the Global Christianity Programme. He lives in Coventry with his partner, Mark Rowland, and son, Dominic and has been a member of the Corrymeela Community for the past three years.

Prayers of Gathering from Psalm 126 were contributed by Desney Cromey. Desney was one of the founding members of Corrymeela. She lives with her husband Roger in Newtownabbey.

“Gospel: Hope in Community” was contributed by Joyce Williams. Joyce, originally from Dublin, has been a member of the Corrymeela community since the 1970s. Together with her husband, Trevor, Joyce is a member of the Church of Ireland, where Trevor served as Bishop. Retired now, they live near Belfast and are active members of Corrymeela’s committees and cell groups.

Questions of character in light of John 12 was contributed by Bríd Cullen. Bríd grew up in Portadown, worked in Corrymeela as Programme Coordinator, and now works in Edinburgh with people with learning disabilities

The group discussion on faith was contributed by Rachel Foley. Rachel works as a teacher. Originally from England, she now lives in Portadown and is not too sure how long she’s been a member of Corrymeela for but it’s probably more than 10 years.

Hope in the darkness, a reflection on grief was contributed by Andy Boal. Andy is a Civil Servant and church musician who has been a member of Corrymeela since 2012, living with his wife and fellow Corrymeela member Joanne in Belfast.



Corrymeela is people. We are young people, middle-aged and old people, we are people of doctrine and people of doubt. We engage with the differences of our world. We disagree with each other, and we seek to disagree agreeably. We know we're part of the problems of the world. We work hard to be part of the solution. We are people of prayers and protest, curiosity and questioning, work and learning.

We are Corrymeela.

And you are always welcome.

You are very welcome to join us at Connections: our Corrymeela Friends weekend, May 27-29. At this event we will speak about the work and witness of Corrymeela, our prayers, practices and projects. More details through this [link](#) or on corrymeela.org

Additionally, we are honoured to welcome Stephen Raw, the extraordinary artist, on a journey of calligraphy, words, art and community. 4th-8th April 2016 More details through this [link](#) or on corrymeela.org