



Listening, Praying & Discerning

Week 1 – Prayer of Hope

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.” Luke 1:68 NRSV

In his book, *We Make the Road by Walking* (Chapter 14), Brian McLaren talks about how being alive in Jesus means having hope for the future and translating that hope into action. These are wise words. There is, however, a challenge in these words because there are different kinds of hope, not all of which lead to life or to a delightful future. One form of hope is outcome-oriented: “*I hope for a certain outcome to what I am facing.*” This is the hope that McLaren talks about, hope that is associated with both God’s action and ours. The Bible is full of outcome-oriented hope and full of fulfilment of this form of hope. These stories are truly phenomenal as they speak of God’s miraculous presence and God’s commitment to God’s people. But the Bible also has stories where the people’s outcome hope is not fulfilled. Job is the most obvious example, but there are others too. Even the hopes of Zechariah in today’s passage are not fulfilled in the way most people would have anticipated. How do we come to terms with this? Or, said otherwise, how do we live with a hope of redemption that is a long, long time in coming?

There is another form of hope, also present in the Bible, a kind of trusting hope – hope that does not depend on the outcome as we want it to be, hope that trusts in the unwavering presence of God, hope that bears fruit of “lightness of being” within us even as we await God’s fulfilment of our outcome-oriented hope. This form of hope is premised on releasing our attachment to how things “must be”. It allows us to be in dark spaces while still seeing rays of light. It allows us to watch for the miracle of God’s work among us even as we do not yet see the fruits of transformation in and among us. This hope is rooted in a deep trust in the God’s mercy, whatever befalls us.

The good news is that these two forms of hope are a “both-and” rather than an “either-or”. We can make our outcome-oriented hopes known to God – and we can act on these hopes – even as we trust in God’s merciful hope, regardless of what transformation happens among us.

This week try to spend anywhere from 2 – 20 minutes per day in intentional silence. Breathe into both of these hopes: 1) *Share with God your hopes for yourself and the congregation.* 2) *Lean into God’s merciful embrace letting go of the same outcomes you have just professed.* As we do this, we will discover that somewhere in this curious mix of hopes, the light we are meant to follow will make itself known to us.

(Note: For a prayer app to support your time of prayer, please see: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/centering-prayer-mobile-app>)

