

## *Questions for Reflection*

Consider reflecting on these questions as you listen to the podcast. You can do this individually, with a partner, or a small group of people.

1. Where do you experience conflicts between our Advent goal of waiting/slowing down/quieting ourselves and the fast pace of the holiday season?
2. Have you ever been in a season of waiting? Maybe for good or bad news? For direction? For change?
3. What is a hope you have for yourself, your family, or your community as you begin this Advent season? How will you make that a reality?
4. What does hope look like?
5. What does hope feel like?
6. Have you ever felt a loss of hope?
7. What are your sources of hope?

## *Hope – by Ally Vertigan*

As I prepare these words on the topic of hope, it's only fair for me to tell you that I'm not feeling much of it these days. I haven't forgotten what hope looks like. I've forgotten what it feels like to take a deep breath that doesn't get stuck on the way out. I've forgotten how to remember the light in the darkness even though my bedroom is covered in stringed lights and candles. Hope seems to be evading me at the moment.

Has it ever done that to you? Has it ever felt like hope has made home with everyone else but you? Perhaps, like me, you're an optimist. You might be able to know and trust that something better is coming. That doesn't change the grey that outlines an ever-present memory, or the sting of a harsh reality. I wonder where hope lives in those moments. I wonder what hope is doing while the world is hurting, while our hearts are breaking, while folks struggle to take the next step in their journey.

What I remember are the Psalms. I love the Psalms because they often give voice to exactly what I'm feeling. They represent my longings and my insecurities, the deepest wells of emotion. The Psalms are like a mirror, an echo.

Psalm 22:5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

For you I wait all day long. Do you remember the last time you waited for something *all day*? A call from a family member, a text, a sense of relief. This Psalm echoes our feelings of desperation, our deep longing for resolution. This Psalm echoes our hope.

Psalm 80:4-7 O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

This is one of those Psalms which describes exactly how I feel sometimes. It doesn't necessarily reflect an absolute Truth; it doesn't necessarily claim that God has, in fact, become angry at people's prayers and for that reason gives them only tears to drink. In my spirit, this Psalm is evidence that other people in time have been in this place of hopelessness, too. Others at their wit's end have cried out to God, sharing their deep longing for a new reality, for salvation, for liberation. This Psalm echoes the whispers of quiet prayers in the moments of darkness before sleep. It reflects our longing to be heard. It reflects our hope that God is present with us in our despair.

In an essay entitled “The Power and Mystery of Naming Things,” author of *The Vagina Monologues* Eve Ensler states, “I believe in the power and mystery of naming things. Language has the capacity to transform our cells, rearrange our learned patterns of behavior, and redirect our thinking. I believe in naming what’s right in front of us because that is often what is most invisible.”<sup>1</sup>

The Psalms do this; they name our feelings in despair and in adoration, in thanksgiving and in supplication. They invite us to practice naming these things in our own words, in our own experiences.

Where I live in California, we’re experiencing one of the worst draughts we’ve ever seen. Today, it is raining. Hard. This rain is a sign of hope. Today, I will practice naming that, allowing the rain to show me that hope shows up in unexpected ways so long as hearts are open to the living grace of God.

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<sup>1</sup>From this text: <http://amzn.com/B000UZNSBS>

Hope- Lisel Mueller

It hovers in dark corners  
before the lights are turned on,  
it shakes sleep from its eyes  
and drops from mushroom gills,  
it explodes in the starry heads  
of dandelions turned sages,  
it sticks to the wings of green angels  
that sail from the tops of maples.  
It sprouts in each occluded eye  
of the many-eyed potato,  
it lives in each earthworm segment  
surviving cruelty,  
it is the motion that runs the tail of a dog,  
it is the mouth that inflates the lungs  
of the child that has just been born.  
It is the singular gift  
we cannot destroy in ourselves,  
the argument that refutes death,  
the genius that invents the future,  
all we know of God.  
It is the serum which makes us swear  
not to betray one another;  
it is in this poem, trying to speak.