



## Advent Meditations: A JustFaith Series Week 2: Hope

Dear Member of the JustFaith Network,

We are grateful that you are a part of our JustFaith community. Whether you are a graduate of one of our programs or you are just getting to know us, we hope this Advent meditation will help sustain you spiritually and equip you to work for justice.

Each Monday during Advent, you'll receive a meditation in your email inbox. You can use it for personal reflection, or you can invite your friends, family, Sunday School class, or current or past JFM small group to join you in-person or over videoconferencing. When Advent is over, our weekly resources will continue to appear in your inbox once a week (unless you unsubscribe). These resources cover a variety of topics relating to justice and spirituality, and you can access an archive of past resources by logging onto your JustFaith account. If you are new to videoconferencing, Zoom tutorials are available [on our YouTube page](#).

In the meantime, we're offering tips and tools for facilitating all of our current programs virtually. While we hope that this weekly resource will spiritually sustain your community while distancing, now is also the perfect time to start one of our 8-week programs on racial justice, immigration, nonviolence, eco-justice, hunger, advocacy and organizing, or the integration of spirituality and action. [Click here](#) to explore our program offerings.

Last but not least, generosity is, at its core, a benefit to everyone. When you donate, your gift helps us sustain and equip individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out](#). Also, please feel free to forward this resource to friends and family!

In solidarity,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



## Welcome and Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

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When everyone has joined your meeting, choose four readers to help with the opening prayer. Then begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with a longer prayer and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short Advent reflection before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

*Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.*

If you are videoconferencing, [share your screen](#), so that everyone can see the prayer.

Prayer: **Living Hope: An incarnation of Daniel Berrigan's credo, "Advent"** (excerpts written in italics.)

Reader 1: O Come, O Come Immanuel. O come into our lives, come into our work,  
Come into our world. We hold fast to the hope of your coming.  
We hold fast to the hope of peace, to the hope of justice,  
To the hope of all joined by the commitment to each other's good.  
We hold fast to hope.

Reader 2: *It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed  
to destruction and loss.  
This is true: For God so loved the world that [God] gave [God's] only begotten  
Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

Reader 3: At a waterside dinner one evening, Mark Maksimowicz and his two cousins decided they were tired of watching garbage fill the Florida waterways that once served as their childhood outdoor recreation spot. While battling cancer himself and caring for a sick daughter, Mark co-founded the Green Armada Foundation. He invested his life savings and purchased a boat designed to pick up trash from the waterways. The organization has evolved into a public charity with dozens of boats and hundreds of volunteers participating across the United States. In one year, the Green Armada collected more than 62 tons of trash and recruited 652 recurring volunteers and 1,100 one-time volunteers. Mark hosted the largest coastal clean-up in the history of the Southern United States: In Clam Bayou, Florida, more than 700 volunteers pulled 9 tons of garbage in 2.5 hours.

Reader 2: *It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination,*

*hunger and poverty, death and destruction -  
This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.*

Reader 4: Concerned about racial tension and equality at Santa Monica High School, Josh Miller, 17, established the "Resilient Youth Foundation," a student-run nonprofit group dedicated to motivating high school students of all backgrounds to succeed in school and in life. Josh's passion for evoking positive change increased when his teammate, classmate and good friend Eddie Lopez was killed in a drive-by shooting. Despite the two friends' diverse backgrounds, they often discussed difficult topics and even aspired to tackle racial tensions that divided their school. As a star athlete with a 4.0 GPA, Eddie had hoped to be the first in his family to attend college. When Eddie was killed, Josh established a scholarship program to recognize students with Eddie's drive for excellence. Josh continued tackling many of the problems he and Eddie discussed by producing a documentary and creating a program called "Rewards for Results," which targets at-risk middle school students and rewards them for improving their grades. More than 700 students have improved their GPAs, work ethic and citizenship as a result, and five Eddie Lopez scholarships have been awarded to deserving students.

Reader 2: *It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word.  
And that war and destruction rule forever -  
This is true: For unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given,  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of  
Peace.*

Reader 1: An Afghan farmer told Army Sgt. Maj. James McDowell that there was an easy way to get him and his fellow farmers to stop growing poppy: Give them saffron bulbs instead. As the most expensive spice in the world, saffron generates nearly as much revenue as poppy, and it takes money out of the hands of drug dealers who work with the Taliban. Led by McDowell, U.S. forces launched "Operation Spicy Devil" and distributed 40,000 saffron bulbs to groups of small farmers. The troops also gave out tools, clothing and other supplies to relieve the farmers' dependence on the Taliban and deliver a blow to the poppy-dependent heroin trade. McDowell's efforts have reached thousands of farmers, who sometimes become addicted to heroin just by working around it.

Reader 2: *It is not true that we are simply victims of the power of evil  
and those who seek to rule the world -  
This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo,  
I am with you, even unto the end of the world.*

Reader 3: Having lived in Gulu, Uganda her whole life, Sister Rosemary has seen the consequences of the Lord's Resistance Army and its devastation on children. Sr. Rosemary refocused her school to help rehabilitate the girls in the town, many of whom became mothers after being abducted by the resistance army and turned into concubines. St. Monica's Girls Tailoring School gives the girls

room, board, an education and vocational skills free of charge. The girls also receive classes in life skills, such as sewing, cooking and cleaning. The program is making a huge impact on the community, and companies call the school requesting employees. The girls are given time to rebuild their lives through counseling, consolation and skill-building. The school feeds, houses and rehabilitates about 300 girls and their babies each year.

Reader 2: *It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specifically gifted, Who are the prophets of the Church, before we can be peacemakers. This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and the young shall see visions, and your old shall have dreams.*

Reader 4: When in abusive situations, deaf women are at greater risk of death than other women, because of a lack of accessible shelters and transitional homes with appropriate facilities for them. Julie Rems-Smario, a deaf woman herself, witnessed violence in the deaf community as a child and later as an adult. In order to bridge the gap between deaf clients and the hearing system, Rems-Smario began DeafHope, a nonprofit agency serving deaf survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The organization has helped 500 deaf survivors of abuse and their children. Rems-Smario and her staff work to educate public servants about the dynamics of domestic violence within the context of the deaf culture. She is planning to build transitional homes for abused deaf women and their children, specially designed by a deaf architect.

Reader 2: *It is not true that our hopes for the liberation of humanity, for justice, human dignity, and peace are not meant for this earth and for this history - This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that true worshippers shall worship in spirit and truth.*

Reader 1: Irania Martinez Garcia lost her daughter to leukemia and was convinced the disease was caused by environmental toxins from the burning of plastic and hospital waste in a dump nearby. Few thought she'd be able to turn the toxic dump site into an eco-friendly haven, but now, Garcia is considered a local hero in Guantanamo. She has helped hundreds of local residents learn how to grow food efficiently while using organic and sustainable materials from the dump and from their own trash. Garcia's idea was to clean up the dump by organizing it into organic and inorganic piles, and then use the organic material to make compost, which would be used to plant fruit trees. The inorganic materials would be stripped down to the core and resold for parts. Meanwhile, Garcia's organization has earned the support of the Cuban government. Pollution declined considerably in the area, and otherwise unemployed citizens have found work converting dumps into resources that help them improve their quality of life.

Reader 3: So let us, this Advent, hold onto hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice.



Let us affirm with true humility, with joy, with faith, with courage:  
Jesus Christ - the Life of the world.

All: Amen.

Daniel Berrigan's "Advent," can be found in his book, *Testimony: The Word Made Flesh* (Orbis)

## Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

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Ask these open-ended questions. If you are by yourself, journal about them.

*Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.*

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).
- **Advent is a time of both darkness and hope. Where have you encountered darkness this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

*Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?*

## Reflection (15 minutes or so)

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Introduce the reflection by asking your group to listen and read along as someone in the group reads aloud this text. [Share your screen](#) so folks can read the words as they are being spoken.

Alternatively, you can [click on this link](#) to listen to Jack Jezreel read the reflection.

*The season is Advent. In our faith tradition, Advent celebrates a dream, a vision, a conviction of what God is up to in this world, what God is birthing in creation, what the world can become. Advent also acknowledges darkness, an obscuring of that dream,*



*and holds the tension between what's been revealed in the life of Christ, the life of love and the capacity of the world and each one of us to live distracted, to live destructively. In the name of our better angels, we proclaim hope. Hope is the dogged insistence that the world can be good, can be holy.*

*In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, "Three things will last forever: faith, hope, and love. He goes on to state his conviction that the greatest of the three is love, and I would concur with his observation. But I would also want to say that faith, hope and love are really not neatly separate experiences. Faith informs hope, hope informs faith, love informs hope, and so on. There's a LOT of overlap, and in this season of Advent with its focus on hope, we recognize that it constantly blurs into faith and love.*

*One of the gifts of being a part of a faith community—a community that believes in God, that believes that there is purpose and truth etched into the DNA of the universe — is that such a faith community is constantly navigating the question about how to live well, how to live faithfully: questions that necessarily prompt us to go deep. We get a limited time on this planet and our choices matter.*

*The Gospels portray a Jesus who is very clear that, yes, our choices do matter; they echo into eternity. OF COURSE, our lives matter. Our commitments matter. And to steer and inspire our choices, Jesus paints a picture; he calls it the Reign of God, which is a reign of love, forgiveness, mercy, justice, community, generosity and, I'll say it again, love. In other words, what Jesus is saying is that if we want our lives to matter, choose the Reign of God, the reign of love, a life of love. If we want our lives to matter—to matter to our neighbors, our children, our grandchildren, to the stranger, to the supposed enemy, to the poor and to matter to our own heart, choose the Reign of God, the Reign of Love.*

*Hope, then, is this vision we live for. Hope is our conviction about the true essence of this world, informed by the very presences of the holy in all things. Hope is informed by love – what I seek is a world made new by love. Hope instills in me the determination that, even when love is defiled or obstructed in this world, in the name of hope I choose love.*

*You see, hope is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism looks around, looks at how things are going, and says, "It looks to me like things are going to go well." Hope also looks around, but looks much deeper, and is able to discern that regardless of "how things are going," there is still and always will be only one thing worth living for, and that is love and a thousand mutations of love: mercy, patience, humility, tenderness, care of the vulnerable, justice and community.*



*Hope helps us in tough times. Unlike optimism, which is not durable, hope helps us navigate the hardships, the darkness and the painful. Hope steers our steps and our responses to both good times and bad by insisting that this world is bent in the direction of love and justice. The winds of injustice and oppression may swirl around me, the disappointment of mercilessness may seem to be overwhelming the world, difficult times may be coming my way, but I still know what to live for. That is hope. That is our call. That is, in fact, what we were made for.*

Guide the group in a conversation around the following reflection questions:

- How has your faith informed your hopes for your life?
- What regular parts of your life speak to hope or draw from hope?
- What gets in the way of hope for you?
- Who inspires hope in your life?
- Who in your life is most in need of hope?

## Announcements (10 minutes-ish)

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- Let participants know that JustFaith Ministries offers programs about a variety of topics, including racial justice, immigration, poverty, eco-justice, and spirituality. These programs are easy to facilitate, and you can do them in person or over video-conferencing.
- Let participants know that the materials for this gathering were free, put together by the JustFaith Ministries staff in order to equip more people for the work of peace and justice. In order to support the creation of more resources and programs, participants are encouraged to donate to JustFaith Ministries through the following link. *If video-conferencing, copy and paste the following link into the chat box:*  
<https://justfaith.org/get-involved/donate/>.
- JustFaith Ministries is currently hosting a monthly webinar series called “Acting for Justice While Sheltering in Place,” in which an expert on a justice-related topic will offer tips for taking action during COVID-19. This Thursday, December 10, Dan Misleh from Catholic Climate Covenant will be addressing the topic of climate change. Visit the [JustFaith Ministries Facebook page](#) for more information on times and topics.
- Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups working for justice.

## Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

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Then say: **Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.**

*Pause for 30 seconds. Then read aloud (slowly, pausing between sentences).*

*If you are meeting **in person**: read the prayer in unison.*

*If you are meeting **virtually**: [share your screen](#).*

Reader 1: To have hope  
Is to believe that history continues open  
To the dream of God and to human creativity.

Reader 2: To have hope  
Is to continue affirming  
That it is possible to dream a different world,  
Without hunger, without injustice,  
Without discrimination.

Reader 1: To have hope  
Is to be a courier of God  
And courier of men and women of good will,  
Tearing down walls, destroying borders,  
Building bridges

Reader 2: To have hope  
Is to believe in the revolutionary potential of faith,  
Is to leave the door open so that  
The Spirit can enter and make all things anew.

Reader 1: To have hope  
Is to believe that life wins over death.

Reader 2: To have hope  
Is to begin again as many times as necessary.

Reader 1: To have hope  
Is to believe that hope is not  
The last things that dies.

Reader 2: To have hope  
Is to believe that hope cannot die,  
That hope no longer dies.

Reader 1: To have hope  
Is to live.



(From *Prayer Without Borders*, an international collection of prayers by Catholic Relief Services)

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to briefly share it:

**We are disciples on a journey.**

**We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.**

**We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.**

**If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.**

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country. Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more just and peaceful world.  
Amen.