

## Preparation for Hope

The story of Pandora comes to us from the ancient Greeks as an attempt to explain why there is suffering in the world. Zeus was angry with humankind for receiving the gift of fire. He and the other gods created a woman, Pandora. They gave her a jar containing all the ills of the world, and when she opened it, those troubles flew out to all of humankind. The only virtue remaining in the jar was hope.

Hope is an elusive concept. Discussing it is difficult because there are multiple meanings for the word. In English we use the word *hope* to mean wishful thinking, to mean optimism, and to mean the faith that things will ultimately be all right. In Spanish the verb *esperar* means both *to hope* and *to wait*. Other languages and cultures have other ways of speaking about hope. This session is focused on the concept of the hope that underlies painful realities.

Hope is powerful. It allows us to live meaningful lives in tough situations. It gives us energy to work toward the world we want to live in and to fight against what we perceive to be wrong. Having a purpose in life encourages hope, as do resilience, service to others, faith, and empowerment. Hope allows us to see beyond the present and feel that somehow it will all be okay.

Although most would agree that hope is a good thing, we cannot will ourselves to be hopeful. When we feel overwhelmed by life, whether it is family problems, health issues, or the world situation, hopelessness is a natural reaction. Some things are horrible and there is little chance of a solution to them. Willing ourselves to feel hopeful can seem pretty futile.

Somehow, though, we sometimes transcend the despair. We might have the sense that no matter how bad our lives or the times are, it is all going to end up okay. Some people are able to find hope in the direst of circumstances. Despite the horror of it all, there were those interned in concentration camps who felt hope. It was hope that allowed the leaders of the civil rights movement to continue their fight even when it seemed that there was little chance of success. Some people with difficult medical diagnoses are able to find hope – hope of a cure, hope that they will learn to live with the illness, or hope that their remaining days will have meaning. The transition from hopelessness to hope can sometimes be a long struggle, and at other times it happens suddenly by a bit of unexplained grace. As the ancient Greeks described in the story of Pandora, hope was the gift from the gods that allowed people to deal with all the suffering that flew out of the jar when she opened it.

Below are a variety of thoughts for you to consider as you ponder the subject of hope.

Hope does not function as an opiate that causes people to deny reality. In fact, hope provides the courage to face whatever chaos and trauma life throws at us. *Andrew D. Lester*

Just as man cannot live without dreams, he cannot live without hope. If dreams reflect the past, hope summons the future. *Elie Wiesel*

There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. *Viktor E. Frankl*

To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow. *Audrey Hepburn*

Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up. *Anne Lamott*

The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our Satisfaction is now beyond ourselves. *Richard Rohr*

Patience is a mind that is able to accept, fully and happily, whatever occurs. It is much more than just gritting our teeth and putting up with things. Being patient means to welcome wholeheartedly whatever arises, having given up the idea that things should be other than what they are. *Geshe Kelsang Gyatso*

Whether you've seen angels floating around your bedroom or just found a ray of hope at a lonely moment, choosing to believe that something unseen is caring for you can be a life-shifting exercise. *Martha Beck*

Isn't it the moment of most profound doubt that gives birth to new certainties? Perhaps hopelessness is the very soil that nourishes human hope; perhaps one could never find sense in life without first experiencing its absurdity. *Václav Havel*

Truly, it is when we come together, reaching out to be with one another, that we can resolve to believe in a world of justice and peace. Together we can risk hope. Together we can invite back the image of beauty. Our small voices can join and form an insistent chorus that affirms that love is an awesome force. *Linda Thomson*

Hope is the struggle of the soul, breaking loose from what is perishable, and attesting her eternity. *Herman Melville*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. What are you feeling particularly hopeful about at this time in your life?
2. What might be causing you to feel hopeless?
3. Think about a time when you went from hopelessness to hope even though the basic situation had not changed. How would you describe the shift in your attitude?
4. What spiritual practices and habits of mind might encourage an attitude of hope? Do you practice any of these, or are you considering any?
5. Do other people affect your level of hope or hopelessness? How can you find friends or communities that make you more hopeful?
6. How can you live by your hopes and not by your fears?

## **Words of the Day**

For the Gathering, think of a word or a phrase to complete this sentence:  
I would like to feel more hopeful about . . . .