

Renewed in Hope:

Week 1: A God of Hope

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*"

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*" Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, "*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*"

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*" Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him. [Matthew 4.1-11]

Video Summary:

Why are things as they are? Why are we divided from one another, careless of the Earth, driven by our fears and needs? Why do we do such harm?

The story of the Fall in the book of Genesis expresses a people's attempt to find an answer; a story of creation and disintegration. Everything comes to be through the giving of God.

Everything falls apart when humankind grasps: not just the fruit of a tree, but the grasping of power, possessions, status: 'you will be like God' says the serpent.

How much we, individually and together need this season of repentance – turning around! Hope is more than wishful thinking, and more than optimism.

Hope is Jesus in the wilderness – our wilderness - choosing not to grab but to trust.

Hope is Jesus with you, me, us in how things are – however messy they might seem.

Hope is the continuing creative life of God that flows to and from us if only we rest our lives in this relationship.

God is not 'over there', waiting for us to get our act together; God's choice is to be alongside and within, sharing our struggles so as to become the means of our movement into freedom, wholeness and generous living.

Some questions for groups:

1. What strikes you about the account of Jesus tempted in the wilderness?
2. What for you is the difference between wishful thinking, optimism and Christian hope?
3. What's the difference between God 'out there', waiting for us to get our act together, and God 'here', in Jesus, with us where we are, however messy it might be?
4. What else spoke to you in the video?

Some personal exercises for prayer and reflection

Hope rests in God's presence within the reality of how things are, and how we are. Share your real self with God without the need to put on a face or pretend to be any other way than how you are. Share your real feelings, desires and hopes. Own any negative feelings or fears you have in relation to God. Let God know that this is how it is for you.

Allow God to meet you as you are. Open up your hands and your heart. Dare to trust that God accepts you as you are, feels your struggles and desires your flourishing. You may not feel this trust, but dare to act what you do not yet experience.

Pray in these words, or use words of your own to express what is in your heart:

*God, I desire to be at home in you, to know you as my rest,
and to abide in your presence.
I want to listen to your voice inviting me into life and freedom.
I give you all in me that finds it hard to trust. I give you my fears.
Give me the courage to hope in your hope for me,
and the daring to respond when you call me by name.*

The lengthening of days

All around us spring is stirring out of winter; Lent is the season of lengthening days; the waking of life, and the flow of hope from the God of hope.

Go out into a garden or a park and notice where spring seems visible and present. Perhaps you will see other places where spring still seems distant.

Where are the 'winter' places in your heart that still need the new life of spring?

The Jesus prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me

The Jesus prayer is an ancient way of prayer central to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Repeat the prayer, in rhythm with your breath, as you go about your day. You can also use this prayer as a way of intercession for others, and for our world:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.

May this God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit

[Romans 15.13]