



STORIES OF COMFORT & HOPE

April 26-June 7, 2020



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Job: Comfort Without Answers

- 1) If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crcc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crcc.org/listen-to-messages.
- 2) As you look at the artwork below, discuss how the story of Job speaks to you. Where do you find in it a source of comfort and/or hope? If you were creating a piece of art based on the story, how would you depict Job?

"Job" by Francis Gruber, 1944

Text: Tate

Francis Gruber was committed to realism and to Communism. Job was painted for an exhibition that opened shortly after the liberation of Paris in 1944. Gruber uses the Biblical story of Job's suffering as an allegory for the survival of hope under the Occupation. The inscription, which comes from The Book of Job, translates as: 'Now, once more my cry is a revolt, and yet my hand suppresses my sobs.'



"Job" Tapestry by Marc Chagall

Text: Rev. David Kylo

The Chagall Tapestry (on page 3) is located in the Rehabilitation Institute in Chicago. The tapestry is called "Job" after the biblical person, Job, who endured huge suffering and loss. He has been called, on more than one occasion, "the patron saint of people with disabilities." The tapestry is 11.5 feet wide and 13 feet high. The imagery depicts scripture from the book of Job (Job 14:7): "For there is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease."

In the tapestry, Job is on the right side, with his wife behind him, dressed in red. Below are Job's three friends: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. Job's wife had told him to "curse God and die." (Job 2:9)

The corners of the tapestry tell Marc Chagall's story of Faith. In the lower right is a person reading from the Scriptures. In the lower left is a rabbi also reading from the Scriptures. In the upper left corner is a depiction of the crucifixion of Jesus. This configuration of Christ represents, for Chagall, the suffering of all mankind.

In the upper right corner is a depiction of the city of Jerusalem. Marc Chagall felt that most people who go through the experience of a disability rely on their faith to carry them through the experience, and Jerusalem is the focal point of many faiths. Below Gabriel is a goat. Chagall was born and raised in a Hassidic Jewish family in Russia. That aspect of the Jewish faith believed that all things in nature are holy. The goat represents the holiness of animals and nature. Between the two upper corners is the angel Gabriel, coming to bring good news to Job.

This tapestry is dedicated to all disabled people of the world. In the upper left corner, Chagall made a gathering of people in the shape of an evergreen tree. In this grouping, one can see, either in a real or illusionary sense, various things used by people with disabilities, such as a wheelchair, canes, various braces (orthotics) and artificial limbs (prosthetics), for those with limb loss.

Since Marc Chagall died before the weaving of the tapestry was completed, the weaver, Yvette Cauquil-Prince, took some license in changing the brilliant colors of purple and blue, characteristic of Chagall's work, into the darker colors seen at the top. The signature of Marc Chagall is in the lower left corner and the signature mark of Yvette Cauquil-Prince is in the lower right corner.

Once the tapestry was completed, policies of the French government complicated the release of the artwork. Approval for its shipment to Chicago took more than nine months. The Friends of the Chagall Tapestry were finally able to convince the French government that it belonged in the lobby of RIC because this was an artwork dedicated to all disabled people in the world. It was then released and put into its present location on June 20, 1986, where it continues to bring its message of Hope.



Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (detail), 359 C.E.

Museum of St. Peter's Treasury, Rome

Text: Bible Odyssey



This high-relief sculpture adorns the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (317–59), a fourth-century Roman politician and early Christian convert. Bassus once held the title of *praefectus urbi* (urban prefect) for Rome. Job is seen, far left, sitting stoically on a pile of refuse as his wife offers him bread. She holds her nose to cover the stench. Between them stands either a friend or perhaps Satan disguised as a merchant, a detail from the version of the Job story found not in the Bible but in the later Testament of Job. To the right are Adam, Eve, and a serpent wrapping itself around the tree between them. This triad seems to mirror Job, his wife, and the tempter. Job likely represents the Christian belief that the faithful, by mimicking the perseverance of Christ, can overcome temptation and grasp eternal life.

- 3) The speaker on Sunday suggested that the Book of Job is a recasting of a traditional tale, in which the protagonist—instead of accepting his fate at the hands of the gods—cries out to the one God, demanding justice. Some of his words are bitter and accusing (see, for example, Job 9:13-24). How easy do you find it to be totally honest with God? What are the advantages of speaking to God in this way? Do you see any potential dangers? As you pray during this week, challenge yourself to be intentionally honest and vulnerable with God.
- 4) Stories can be powerful ways of communicating how we feel about our sense of God's presence or absence. Can you think of a time in your life when God felt very present, despite difficult circumstances? Share this story with others in your group, or with a friend who might find encouragement through it.



Jacob and Esau: Hope for Reconciliation

If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crcc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crcc.org/listen-to-messages.

During our series “Stories of Comfort and Hope,” we are using artistic expression to explore the messages and provoke discussion. Creating, performing and experiencing art can help us experience the mysteries of God, life, and our own humanity in unique ways. This week our theme is “Hope for Reconciliation” based on the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis.

Below are samples of poetry, music and visual art that each create an opportunity for contemplation. We are all different, and have varying tastes for art, so pick one or more that you think will appeal to you. Let them help you reflect on the message, and relate it to your own life. You may have already experienced forgiveness and reconciliation, and these artistic forms will resonate with you. But you might also feel caught in a painful gap where you long for reconciliation but don’t seem to be able to make it happen. Don’t worry; let these artistic forms comfort you with hope and an encouragement that you are not alone.

Then look at the two questions at the end, and take a moment this week to share in discussion with your small group or with a friend

1. Reconciliation Through Poetry

Poetry at its best can probe our deepest thoughts and feelings, and give voice to sentiments that we could not otherwise have expressed ourselves. Poetry, in all its forms, has the capacity to transcend time—to speak to all manner of experiences though the ages, and to help us experience in a moment a reality that has been there for an eternity.

Below are two poems with a brief note about the authors. Pick one (or both) and let them speak to you about reconciliation. Don’t worry about what they mean to others: What do they mean to you? How do they make you feel? In what ways do you resonate with them? What aspects of the journey do you share with them? How might they help you in your current situation? Where might they lead you?

"The Stare's Nest by My Window" by W.B. Yeats

William Butler Yeats [1865-1939] was an Irish poet who wrote a lot about love, war, loss and grief. The oppression his homeland experienced and the resulting social and political upheaval were a crucible in which some of his finest work formed. A "stare" is an Irish expression for a starling.

*The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
More Substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

"Forgiveness" by John Greenleaf Whittier

Whittier was a nineteenth century author and poet from Massachusetts. He was a Quaker, an Abolitionist, and one of the founders of "The Atlantic Monthly" (now "The Atlantic" magazine).

*My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So, turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burial-place;
Where, pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and trembling I forgave!*

2. Reconciliation Through Music

Like poetry, music can move us deeply, touching parts of our being that words simply cannot. Below are links to two short pieces of music that in some ways might represent a journey of reconciliation. The first is a little lighter, while the second is a little heavier. Pick one (or both) and listen while alone and able to let the music soak in. What feelings does it arouse in you? How does each piece begin emotionally, and where does it take you? Try to identify your emotions, and as you reflect on forgiveness and reconciliation in your own life, let it lead you to deeper awareness. When do you identify with sadness in the music? When with longing, anger, remorse, hope? How does the music resolve in the end? Is there a sense of reconciliation and homecoming? What might this mean for you personally?

Intermezzo in A Major Op 118 No 2 by Johannes Brahms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h4Re5WBEAc>

Prelude in B minor, Op. 32, No. 10 by Sergei Rachmaninoff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHGd624HzDc>

3. Reconciliation Through Visual Art

On the next page are two paintings. The first is called "Jacob and Esau" by George Frederic Watts. The second is called "The Return of the Prodigal Son" by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. In the message on Sunday, we saw how these two biblical stories are related. The way the father lovingly greets his "prodigal" son in Luke 15: 20 is very similar to how Esau greets Jacob in Genesis 33:4.

Spend some time contemplating each picture. Look carefully and actively. What does each painting capture for you? How does it make you feel? With whom do you identify? Look at the physicality of the people; what do their postures "say"? How do the two paintings compare? What are the similarities and differences with the stories they tell visually? How do these stories relate to your own story as one who needs to forgive as well as be forgiven?



Jacob and Esau by George Frederic Watts



The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn

4. In the message on Sunday, the speaker suggested that the story of Jacob and Esau speaks to us about reconciliation in multiple ways. Reconciliation is about coming to terms with and forgiving ourselves as well as others. It's about the healing of society collectively, where we see the face of God in all people and act empathetically to overcome inequity and injustice. Reconciliation is also about coming to terms with God—courageously facing our doubt and questions, especially in times of hardship and confusion. It means wrestling with God, and being prepared to embrace new understandings and awareness. Which of these challenges do you feel most especially applies to you right now, and why? Share in your group or with a friend what you are going through right now and how this story could help.

5. Share your story: We all gave experiences of reconciliation. For most of us, we also have incomplete stories that have not resolved yet—stories where we find ourselves in the middle, longing for reconciliation, longing to be forgiven, and yet not receiving it. Share your story with others in your group, or with a friend, as a source of encouragement and support to one another.



Ruth and Naomi: Choosing Hope Together

If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crcc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crcc.org/listen-to-messages.

During our series “Stories of Comfort and Hope,” we are using artistic expression to explore the messages and provoke discussion. Creating, performing and experiencing art can help us explore the mysteries of God, life, and our own humanity in unique ways. This week our theme is “Choosing Hope Together” based on the story of Ruth and Naomi.

1. Finding God in the Story

In the Book of Ruth, God is only described as directly intervening twice, and yet the speaker on Sunday claimed God is acting throughout the story. Artists have struggled with recognizing God’s presence in this story. Read the poem and contemplate the sculpture below.

Think about your own life: Where do you see God acting—directly or through others? Where does God seem absent? Share your thoughts in your group, or with a friend.

The story's strange. For once, God wasn't talking,
Busy with some sacrifice or slaughter
Somewhere else. No plague, cloud, gushing water,
Dream, omen, whirlwind. Just two women, walking
The dusty road from Moab to Judea,
One, the younger, having told the other
(Not her own, but her dead husband's mother)
That she would never leave her. But they flee a
Famine for what, at first, seems something worse:
To come as widows to a crowded city,
To men's appraising stares, and women's pity.
Ruth, the pagan, heard Naomi curse,
Cringed and scanned the sky. No fire or stone
Came crashing downward. They were on their own.

Catherine Tufariello



"Ruth and Naomi" by Leonard Baskin. 1979. Bronze

Born in New Jersey in 1922, the son of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, Leonard Baskin was raised with a respect for learning and a concern for Jewish heritage. Baskin believed it was his moral duty to express the human condition in his work.

2. Praying for *Hesed*

Hesed is a beautiful Hebrew word meaning steadfast love, loyalty, and covenantal faithfulness. It is freely given, self-sacrificial, loving kindness. In the watercolor below, the artist prays for God's *hesed* (or *chesed*) to fill her community.

חסד

Take some time to think of people and situations close to you in need of God's *hesed*, and pray for them. You can do this individually, with a friend, or in your group.

If your heart feels overwhelmed, consider sketching your own picture as a form of prayer. It does not need to be skillful—simply use the process as a way of asking for God's loving kindness to be more evidently present.



"Hesed" by Risa Aqua (www.risaaqua.com)

3. Practicing *Hesed*

Check out this brief video that asks the question: "What if kindness were a form of music?"
www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4JOOD72xgA

Now listen to this track, entitled "Kindness": www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Y83VyPjG9M
In what ways does this music make you think of kindness? In what ways does it not?

Think back to a time when someone showed you (or you showed someone) a significant act of kindness. What type of music would you associate with that act? Was that kindness reciprocated or "paid forward" in any way that you are aware of?

Think of someone you can show great kindness to this week. Don't settle for something quick and easy! Practice *hesed* by going above and beyond what is required of you. Share your idea with a friend or in your group. You are much more likely to carry out your good intentions if someone else is aware of them.

4. Full or Empty

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem she said, "I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty." In what ways was this true? In what ways was it not true? How do you think Ruth felt when she heard Naomi say that?

In what ways is your own life full? In what ways is it empty? How can you encourage others by focusing on the parts that are full?



Psalm 23: The Comfort of God's Presence

If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crcc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crcc.org/listen-to-messages.

This week we have been looking at Psalm 23—possibly one of the most hopeful and comforting passages in the whole Bible. We looked at it as a meditation that can help us hear the loving, compassionate, empowering voice of Jesus, rather than the many other negative voices we hear internally and externally. Discuss the following questions with your group or with a trusted friend and take a moment each day to do the personal meditation.

Discussion Questions

1. What struck you most about the message on Sunday, and why?
2. Which part of this psalm speaks most especially to you? With that in mind, how would you describe the current related narratives (“other voices”) that you need to leave behind? What do you think the “voice of Jesus” is saying, and how can you respond to that?
3. Share a time when you have experienced the comforting presence of God. What were you going through? How did you feel comforted? How could you foster more of that presence in your life now?

Personal Meditation

Take 3 minutes each day this week to meditate on each part of the psalm. Read the whole psalm all the way through (one minute) and then take two minutes to reflect on the highlighted section (use the suggestions for meditation, if helpful). Try to be mindful of your reflections throughout the day, and listen for the inner voice of love—the voice of Jesus.

1. Meditation for Sunday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- Throughout the day consciously give thanks for what you have and receive.

- Each time you become anxious about tomorrow (or the next day, or the next minute!) let go of that fear and focus on gratefulness.

Psalm 23

**The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;**

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

2. Meditation for Monday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- Do you feel tired? When is the last time you had a refreshing rest? What keeps you from resting?
- Take some short moments out of you work and activity to quietly rest. Let go of any guilty feelings.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

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He restores my soul;**

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
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Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

3. Meditation for Tuesday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- What are some ways in which you walk in circles trying to avoid conflict, please people, or trying to manipulate outcomes?
- Walk in straight, honest, just and kind lines today.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

**He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.**

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

4. Meditation for Wednesday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- In what ways do you feel overwhelmed or oppressed?
- Throughout the day, when you feel afraid, take a moment to breathe in God's love and acceptance. Each time choose to accept the reality of God's presence rather than abandonment.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
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Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

5. Meditation for Thursday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- What actions and behaviors in your life are causing you or others pain or frustration?
- Throughout the day listen to your pain and frustration, and don't run from it. What is it telling you?

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
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Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

6. Meditation for Friday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- How have difficult people or difficult situations and struggles in your life helped you become a better person?
- Throughout the day give thanks for them.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;

For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.**

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

7. Meditation for Saturday

Read the whole psalm and meditate for 2 minutes on the highlighted part.

- Sit quietly and open you heart to feel any sense of fear, foreboding or paranoia. What do you think is the cause of that?
- Each time you become anxious today, remind yourself that goodness and mercy is following you and they are more powerful than any of the darkness you might sense over your shoulder.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.**



Rebuilding the Temple: Hope for the Long Haul

If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crcc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crcc.org/listen-to-messages.

This week we are looking at the story of Zerubbabel, Joshua and the families who returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon with a mission to rebuild God's temple. Discuss the following questions with your group or with a trusted friend, and take a moment each day to do one of the spiritual practices listed below.

Discussion Questions

1. What resonated with you most about the message on Sunday, and why?
2. Look at the pictures of houses of worship below. How do they make you feel? Are there any aspects of the architecture or decoration that speak to you of God? If you were building a church, what features would you incorporate, and why?



Figure 1: Golden Temple, Amritsar, India



Figure 2: Angkor Wat, Cambodia



Figure 3: Cathedral Of Brasilia, Brazil

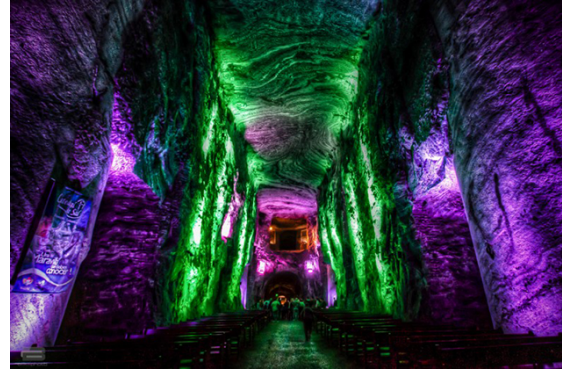


Figure 4: Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, Colombia



Figure 5: Fairfield Friends Meeting House, England



Figure 6: New Synagogue, Berlin, Germany

3. Scripture teaches that we are individually and collectively God’s temple. God is in us, and we bring God’s presence to others. Share the story of a time you brought God’s presence to someone else, or someone brought God’s presence to you.

Personal Spiritual Practices

The Israelites who returned to Jerusalem didn’t wait until the temple was built before they started their regular practices of worshipping God. They improvised—and we might need to do that, too! Your schedule may have changed: you may have less structured days, or find yourself busy juggling roles and responsibilities. Rather than waiting for “normality” to resume, select a simple practice you can incorporate into your day to worship and grow in your relationship with God.

- **Use a phone app**—download and use an app such as “The Bible App” or “Pray As You Go”
- **Go on a walk with God**—go for a walk in silence, and listen for the voice of God
- **Sing to God**—sing or listen to a song that moves you and helps you feel connected to God
- **Daily prayer**—set aside a few minutes at a specific time each day to pray
- **Read a psalm**—read a psalm each day and reflect on it
- **Object reminder**—keep an object such as a small rock (perhaps with a word written on it) in your pocket or on your desk to remind you that God is with you





Jesus Walks on Water: Courage to Step into the Unknown

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During our series “Stories of Comfort and Hope,” we are using artistic expression to explore the messages and provoke discussion. Creating, performing and experiencing art can help us experience the mysteries of God, life, and our own humanity in unique ways. This week we looked at the stories of Jesus calming a storm and walking on water, and how we can experience courage, peace and even empowerment in our own life-storms.

Below are samples of visual art, music and poetry (actually a psalm) that each create an opportunity for contemplation. Let them help you reflect on the message, and relate it to your own life. Then look at the two questions at the end, and take a moment this week to share in discussion with your small group or with a friend.

Courage through Visual Art

Below are three storm paintings by Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851). Spend some time looking at each one. Try to sink into the scene and find yourself in it.

- What feelings and emotions does it evoke in you?
- How are the sky and water distinct and indistinct from one another?
- How does this relate to your own life? Where is there darkness; where do you see light? Where is there beauty and fear?
- How does the painting embody chaos, and how does it embody peace?

Take some time to let these paintings open your heart and mind to the possibility of courage and hope.



Seascape with Storm Coming On



Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth



The Morning after the Storm

Courage through Music

Below are links to two pieces of music. The first is quite famous and prevalent in our culture, and might sound familiar. The second one might be less familiar. Click on the links and listen. The visual images are not all that helpful, so it might be best to close your eyes while you listen. Either way, set aside time so you can listen without interruption (perhaps a few times through). Let yourself sink into the music, let it wash over, around and into you. Let it carry you.

- How does it make you feel?
- When does it seem peaceful; when does it feel chaotic and stormy?
- What tension and anger does it arouse in you and why?
- Let your own life merge with the music and let the music evoke your emotions. Where is your life at the moment? Do you sense a storm coming? Are you in one right now? Or do you feel the storm is subsiding?
- When does the music seem to transition and resolve? How does that make you feel?
- If there is any musical beauty, comfort or relief in the transition, what does this say about the storm itself?

Take some time to let the music open your heart and mind to the possibility of courage and hope.

Movements 4 and 5 from Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 (also known as the "Pastoral Symphony")
by Ludwig van Beethoven

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rn9_C6X4UXM

Etude-tableau Op. 39 No. 2 in A Minor by Sergei Rachmaninoff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXZoZ5jRWQw>

Courage through Poetry

Read Psalm 13 below.

- How do you relate to this Psalm? In what ways does it connect to any of your own feelings of chaos, anger, abandonment or despair?
- In our current situation, how might storms, chaos and confusion feel like metaphorical “enemies”?
- Where is the storm in this psalm? How does it resolve? How do you relate to this resolution yourself?
- In what ways do you find comfort, hope and courage here?

Psalm 13 - New International Version

(For the director of music. A psalm of David.)

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for he has been good to me.*

In the Message on Sunday

1. What struck you most about the message?
2. The speaker suggested that these stories about Jesus calming the storm and walking on water reflect an invitation to us to share in the divine life that Jesus experienced. What do you think about this? What are the implications for us? Do you agree that Jesus’ view about “salvation” has more to do with empowerment than rescue?

Share your Story

Share about a time when you felt empowered during difficult circumstances (in your own life-storm).

- What was the situation and how did it evolve?
- Did you always feel positive during it?
- How did it resolve and why? What made you feel empowered?

Share your story with others in your group, or with a friend, as a source of encouragement, and support to one another.



Paul's Perils: Finding Strength in Christ Together

If you missed the message on Sunday, you can find it on our website at www.crc.org/virtual-sunday or at www.crc.org/listen-to-messages.

This week we are looking at the story of Paul, particularly some of the perilous challenges he faced as he took the message of God's kingdom around the Roman Empire. Discuss the following questions with your group or with a trusted friend, and consider taking a few moments to do the spiritual practice below.

Discussion Questions

1. What resonated with you most about the message on Sunday, and why?
2. Look at the following pieces of artwork of the Apostle Paul. Both of these were by Rembrandt, painted 30 years apart. What do you notice about his portrayal of Paul? What emotions does he capture?



The Apostle Paul, Rembrandt, 1657



St. Paul in Prison, Rembrandt, 1627

3. An online review of artwork of Paul reveals very few paintings that portray Paul as joyful or happy. Why do you think that is? How does this compare or contrast to what Paul had to say in 2 Corinthians or other passages of Scripture?
4. Describe a time that you felt comforted by God. How did you feel before and afterwards? How did this sense of comfort come to you?
5. Paul's example encourages us to be honest about our struggles. Has sharing your struggles with others been easy or difficult for you? Can you describe a time when you let someone know about your challenges, and then that person encouraged or comforted you?

Spiritual Practice

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Paul said: *"We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in. We are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end. We are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God. We are knocked down, but not knocked out."* Take some time to reflect on your current state of heart and mind. Create a statement like Paul's that puts into words how you are feeling. Share this as a prayer to "the God of all comfort." Ask for God's help and/or listen for God's voice.