**“Hopeful Spirituality” week 1: Living with Integrity**

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Would you describe yourself as a hopeful person? What are some ways you a feeling hopeful at the moment, in your own life and the world around you? How are you struggling to find hope? What impact do you feel this is having on you?
3. Read Matthew 7:24-29. This is one of Jesus’ more famous parables. What are some of the interpretations and applications you’ve heard before? As you read it today, what does it mean to you?
4. The above parable comes at the end of Jesus’ first major set of teaching in the Gospel of Matthew which has become known as “The Sermon on the Mount”. Read Matthew 5:13-16 which is close to the beginning of this section of teaching. How does it relate to the closing parable and what are the implications for our lives? How would you describe the kind of spirituality Jesus is describing? In what way is it hopeful?
5. Later in this sermon Jesus seems to advocate for religion (read Matthew 5:17-20). But in Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus seems to be challenging religion. Why do you think Jesus is creating this tension? How do you experience this tension in your own life?
6. Read Matthew 24:1-2. This is from the beginning of Jesus’ fifth and final set of major teachings in the Gospel of Matthew. He seems to be alluding to the brutal Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70CE and the eventual destruction of the Temple which had become a symbol of Jewish Nationalism. How might Jesus’ words here relate to the parable of the two builders in Matthew 7:24-29? What are the political and spiritual implications to his listeners? What might the Temple in that time symbolize in our culture now? What are the political and spiritual implications for us and in what ways could this be hopeful?
7. Read Matthew 16:13-18. The scene is set in Caesarea Philippi a center of Roman and Herodian power. Why do you think Jesus waits until he is in this location to ask his disciples who they think he is? What do you think he means by “the rock” – what exactly is he saying he will build on? How does this relate to the parable in Matthew 7:24-29? What are the implications for us and in what ways could this hopeful?
8. Take a few moments to share about situations in your own life where you feel you need to establish more solid ground. Then take some time to pray for one another.

**Practice for the week: Centering on Solid Ground**

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

**Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)**

Take a moment each day to recenter on Jesus and his way of embodying God’s love. Sit quietly and read the words of Jesus above. Receive them as an invitation into your day. Focus on your breathing and imagine yourself surrounded by God’s love. Breathe in that love with each breath. As you breathe out release fear, anxiety, judgement, and tension. Let go of any pressure or burden you feel and allow yourself to rest in this love. Then open your heart to the presence of Christ and invite Jesus to help you learn and live his way. Receive this as a gift from an infinitely wise and loving teacher. Rest in this centered posture for a few minutes and consciously return to it throughout your day.