**“Hopeful Spirituality” week 3: Living with Courage**

**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. What stories have inspired you to hope courageously. These could be non-fiction or fiction (books, movies, mythology, history etc.). They could be stories you have experienced or witnessed. Share with one another about why you find them so inspiring and how they have impacted your life.
3. In the mythology of J. R. R. Tolkien there is a recurring theme of how people who feel timid and insignificant gain great courage through the simple affection and faithfulness of their friends. Is there a time you can share about when you experienced this yourself? Who needs that kind of affection and faithfulness from you right now?
4. Read this week’s “Jesus story” in Luke 14:1-6 and discuss the following:

* Why do you think the Jesus “went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee?”
* Jesus is being closely watched. Have you ever felt critically scrutinized like this before? How did it make you react?
* How do you observe Jesus reacting in this story?
* Where do you see courage in this story and where do you see its absence?

1. Read Luke 9:51-56. Why do you think Jesus goes through Samaria? What emotional reactions to you see in this story and what is their source? Where do you see courage in this story and where do you see its absence?
2. Read Luke 13:33-34, Luke 19:42-44, and Luke 23:32-34. How do you see Jesus embodying compassion in these accounts? In what ways is this hopeful? In what ways is this courageous? How do these accounts challenge you personally about compassion (especially for people who seem opposed or contradictory to you)? How do they challenge you about hope for people, society, and humanity in general? In what ways do you need to be more courageous?
3. Read Luke 5:15-16. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus withdraws into silence and solitude (prayerful space). Share ways you might need to recenter yourself to have more courageous hope. Then spend some time praying for one another.

**Practice for the week: The Examen**

Hope can be viewed as a decision in the present moment not to allow the present circumstances to overwhelm us such that we give up on the way of love. One of the challenges is that we are not always conscious of this in any given moment. The Examen is a helpful exercise to help us become more aware and can be practiced at the end of each day.

Sit quietly alone and take a moment to center yourself. Then “relive” your day in your imagination by allowing your thoughts to guide you through the day’s events. As you do this, focus particularly on your interactions with others – in your family, at work or school, in your neighborhood or online. These “interactions” might be your internal thoughts or attitudes, or they could be actual conversations and encounters. Do this without judging yourself but simply notice and ask the following two questions:

At what times during your day were your thoughts and actions grounded in courage and hope?

* What happened?
* How were you hopeful and what empowered you in this way?
* Were you aware of this hope or is it only now as you look back that you realize it?
* What was the outcome?

At what times during your day were you fearful and despairing?

* What happened? Did you give up on yourself, judge someone else, or were you overwhelmed by circumstances?
* Were you aware of this fear and despair or is it only now as you look back that you realize it?
* What were your feelings or beliefs about the situation and any person(s) involved, including yourself and God?
* How would being more conscious and grounded in courageous hope have made a difference in this situation for you?

When you have finished reflecting on your day, continue to sit quietly without self-judgment. Invite God’s presence and allow yourself to sink deeply into God’s total acceptance – feel this love as the source of hope and courage for you as you let go of fear. Invite God’s love to empower you to live more consciously from this center tomorrow.