

"Looking In the Eyes of Hope"  
A Advent One, Matthew 24:36-44  
November 27, 2016  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev Rebecca K. Poos

START OF WORSHIP:

**Mary Oliver.**

*"Making the House Ready for the Lord"  
Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed  
but still nothing is as shining as it should be  
for you.*

*Under the sink, for example, is an  
uproar of mice it is the season of their  
many children.  
What shall I do? And under the eaves  
and through the walls the squirrels  
have gnawed their ragged entrances but it is the season  
when they need shelter, so what shall I do?  
And the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the  
cupboard while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;  
what shall I do?  
Beautiful is the new snow falling  
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly  
up the path, to the door.  
And still I believe you will come, Lord: you will, when I  
speak to the fox,  
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose,  
know that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,  
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.*

**TIME WITH CHILDREN/ADVENT LIGHTING**

**HOPE—ADVENT WEEKS**

This year, instead of having one candle for Hope, Peace, Love,  
Joy, we light four candles of hope.

- 1) Hope for Those Who Wait
  - 2) Hope for Those Who Are Weary
  - 3) Hope for Those Who Are Watching
  - 4) Hope for Those Who Are Wounded
- Christmas Eve) Hope for Those Who Are Willing

And, our song and our prayer, as we hope, reminds us where  
our hope lies: in God's light, made flesh and walking among  
us, showing us the light and how to BE the light:

"Christ, be our light!  
Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the darkness.  
Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church  
gathered today."

What IS hope, anyway? (Tell story of Oasis—transforming  
schools where no hope was before)

Wherein lies our hope? How do we keep up the hope, the faith,  
the love?

“Looking In the Eyes of Hope”  
A Advent One, Isaiah Matthew 24:36-44  
November 27, 2016  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev Rebecca K. Poos

## **I. ADVENT UPON US**

Advent. Aventus in Latin: arrival. Coming. Advent is come upon us. Are we **ready**?! Can we *ever* be truly ready?! I think not. Especially when we’re still wanting a *little* more Thanksgiving. A little more turkey, a little more cranberry sauce and stuffing and pumpkin pie. A little more relaxing with family and friends and taking a breath. A little more “Come, Ye Thankful People Come” and “Now Thank We All our God.”

You see, I got cheated out of Thanksgiving hymns this year! I was in worship last Sunday, but it wasn’t in a church in a traditional setting and I truly felt my spirit got a little “gypped.” I did find the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on You Tube has some pretty inspiring renditions of all our favorite “Thanksgiving Hymns.”

Advent challenges us. Watch. Wait. Wake up! Be alert. You don’t know when it’s coming, because you can plan and calendar and even decorate in plenty of time, but Advent is much more than a 4-week “season in the church year.” Advent is a “coming.” Of the Divine into our earthly lives.

We revel in powerful scriptures about the Return of Christ” as prophesied from of old. We prepare for the coming *again* of the baby into our hearts and lives.

Advent is *any* of these things and *ALL* these things. The coming of Christmas, the coming again. The coming of God into our lives when and where we *least* expect the Holy to show up. It might be like a fear-inducing, huge, roaring Angel—telling us, like Mary—not to be afraid, at the same time scaring the bejeebers out of us!

Are we ready? How will we respond? In this new day, this new “church year and season? Here, in this place, we will look forward in Hope—a hope that isn’t just about some “future event” or “end times” when we talk of the Return of Christ. But, *our* hope is in a new way of seeing and living in the world now. To explore together what hope looks like **now**, in every detail and interaction of our lives.

For the prophets of old, hope in the coming of the Lord looked like a wonderful, God-infused celebration! The million-person gathering to beat all!

## **Isaiah 2:1-5**

**2** In days to come

the mountain of the Lord’s house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.

**3** Many peoples shall come and say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

**4**

He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

5

O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

## **II. CREDO—GIVE THE HEART TO**

So, how do we enter this journey of hope? Endeavor together to “go with joy into God’s light and life” this Advent season, as we prepare and watch and wait to welcome the Divine among us?

Let me tell you a little about why I wasn’t here singing “Now Thank We All Our God” last Sunday. The Spirit has been nudging the United Church of Christ about its pastors, and that they might just need a re-charge, a retreat, a pause midstream in their lives and ministries to stop, reflect and renew. To be cared for and checked in on, inspired and uplifted.

So, following Spirit’s nudging, the program the Episcopalians have been using for several years has been adopted by the UCC, and it was my turn to go. And, we got to be guinea pigs, since this was only the third “pilot” session. That’s always fun!

We were gathered up (30 mid-career pastors from all over the country) and gathered-in to a retreat center on the beach in North Carolina. For 4.5 days we rested, reflected, filled our heads and souls with wisdom, amazing healing worship, wise counsel; our bodies with healthy, abundant food and exercise in the sun (on the beach, no less!)

The program is called CREDO. That’s not an acronym after all, but from a Latin word for belief or core principles. Like creed. But on a deeper level, it’s not what you believe in your “head” but what you “give your heart too.”

We pondered more than any brain could hold about practices and programs, plans and pitfalls of ministry—from the instruction, and from sharing with our peers around the table. And, we learned more about ourselves and our souls than we ever could have imagined!

We learned of “wholism”—how Spiritual, Emotional, Vocational, Physical, and Financial aspects of life and us are inseparable. Wholism: all these parts of life and living flow together—in and out of one another. That they are not categories!

That how we manage our finances is a spiritual matter, for example. That how our spiritual selves are doing feeds into how we take care of our physical health. We might *know* this in our “book learning heads,” but to truly explore what it means to *live* in that understanding is a powerful way to “do life!” And faith. And family, friends, footsteps on this earth.

## **III. CREDO—GOING DEEPER**

The first day, weary of travel, a friend and I quickly hit the beach for a thoughtful walk and conversation before the sun was completely gone. Then, right before supper, when we hadn’t been there 2 hours yet, I had an abrupt message from “on high” that I HAD to “unplug.”

Go offline, unhook, take care of my soul for a change. I didn’t need to hear about the election. Or the aftermath. Or see who was fighting with whom this week. I knew Reverend Bob had things well in hand here, and that Clarke could reach me if any of you had an emergency of any kind.

I wasn’t sure I could do it! But, the minute I gave my soul permission to unplug and tend to deeper reflection and renewal, I felt huge relief! And never looked back. Not till the day before we left and I needed to check in for my flight.

That was the first step. And as we all went deeper, below the surface ways of living and relating that we do so rampantly in our society, the sense was *overwhelming* that we have

neglected the ways of the soul. Have failed to ask our souls what we *need* for fullness of life. Have skimmed the surface in so many ways that have left us dry, undernourished and hungry.

I went into the CREDO experience wondering if I was “burned out.” What I awoke to was that my soul was weary. That is different. The soul needs tending, nurturing, listening to—in all of us! Our deepest selves cry out for rest, rejuvenation, retreat. And this is completely different from “going on vacation.” You can’t just “give your soul a day off”, like lying on the couch instead of going to the gym to give your body a day off. Care of the soul requires attention. Intention. Thoughtful purpose.

#### **IV. CREDO in CONGREGATION**

As this washed over me—literally in the ocean waves—as I walked in the healing waters barefoot along the shore, I thought long and deeply about our congregation. I considered how diligently we’ve all worked and served and ministered these past seasons.

About how hard it’s been for the Nominating Committee this year to find people to either keep serving or join a board or fill a leadership role. When ushers and greeters and singers and coffee hour hosts and teachers and organizers are hard to find. When many things can become a struggle: the endless budget stretching, begging for response and participation; can we *really* blend worship styles, so that everyone finds worship meaningful? Can we really fathom doing the Bazaar again next year?!

It’s not that people have “commitment issues”—I think **our collective soul is weary**. When the well is dry, it’s hard to want to work harder, to take on more tasks, to-do’s and responsibilities. We are grieving loss—loss of loved ones and activities and roles. We are wounded by the dissension and vitriol in our own community when we can’t agree on priorities and procedures.

Our souls are weary from the endless striving to do good and

further God’s mission. We are discouraged in the “struggle for justice and peace” –when hatred and division in our wider communities seems to keep growing and our efforts seem in vain.

I think we as CUCC need a Credo experience. Credo--Give the heart to. To tend our hearts and hearth, take some time to pause, reflect, nurture and nourish our collective soul.

#### **V. INVITATION TO JOURNEY**

Today is New Year’s Day in the Church. Time for a different kind of resolution. I am embarking on a journey of “care for the soul”, and I invite—actually—*strongly encourage* you to join me. We can start with baby steps. Advent One. We can learn together, sharing what we find soul-feeding and what is soul-squelching. “Like one person showing another where to find bread.”

We talked last week about “being the Church” more fully and profoundly now in these community-wounding times we find ourselves in. But, we can’t rise effectively in strength and solidarity to fight the good fight when our souls are weary and hurting. And tending to our deeper selves—on our own and together—is not the same as being an ostrich—shrinking into indifference. For we care for our own souls as we care for the souls of others and the world. Both/and. At the same time. So that we might be the Body of Christ in the fullest ways possible.

#### **VI. LOOKING HOPE IN THE EYE**

Jill Rowe, creator and director of a life-changing, transformational program in schools in the UK. It’s called Oasis, and they are given schools that are failing and they go in—this Oasis program—and turn them around. It’s not easy, and it takes time and a lot of love and effort, but transformation happens—in the schools and in the teachers and students.

Rowe gives us a hint about how we begin to do this kind of transformation wherever we find ourselves—and it begins with

looking for hope—in the eyes of others.

She says, “We walk into forgotten communities. Walk into those spaces. People **won’t look you in the eye**. People *don’t* look you in the eye when they’re down on hope. They don’t have it.

So in our schools, the children are greeted at the door with a handshake. A handshake before they walk in the door. When you look at someone, that’s when you let them know that they’re precious—that they are made in God’s image.”

We need to look each other (and ourselves!) in the eye. Our brothers and sisters sitting or living next to us, as well as those who are strangers or estranged from us, and see the aching in their souls and ours.

See the longing for tender understanding and care; listen to our own hearts crying out in order to reach out beyond ourselves.

Every day in Advent, sure—have a chocolate! But, ask the question: What is my soul needing today? What is it crying out for? Tenderness? Listening, rest, forgiveness, recreation, prayer? Am I trying to fill an empty place in my soul with “bread that does not satisfy?”

Then, Question #2 each day: Is there someone—a person or a group in conflict—maybe struggles in our community and world, where I can ask: “**How is it with your soul?**” Do they need an understanding ear? A look in the eye to signal hope? To be truly seen? To know they are beloved?

Every day. Ask the question of your own soul and of another’s, or others, plural. We CAN find and heal our collective soul. It’s not lost forever. It’s just below the surface. We need to go deeper –within ourselves and in our relationships with each other—to find it.

We have a resource to help us on this journey. An Advent Calendar created by UCC Pastor Molly Baskette. I will give them

to you as you leave today.

## **VII. FINDING HOPE**

Tending to our souls, listening to the life that wants to be lived in us—that’s how we journey in hope. Where we join together to find hope. Hope as we wait, when we are weary, as we watch, when we are wounded, and find our “willing” when it is called forth.

“Looking in the eyes of hope.”

For Jesus comes to us soon—as a babe in a manger—seeking room in our hearts. Jesus comes to us when the time is fulfilled—bringing God’s kingdom into our midst in Kairos—God’s time until the end of time and beyond.

Are we ready for Advent?

May it be so, Amen.