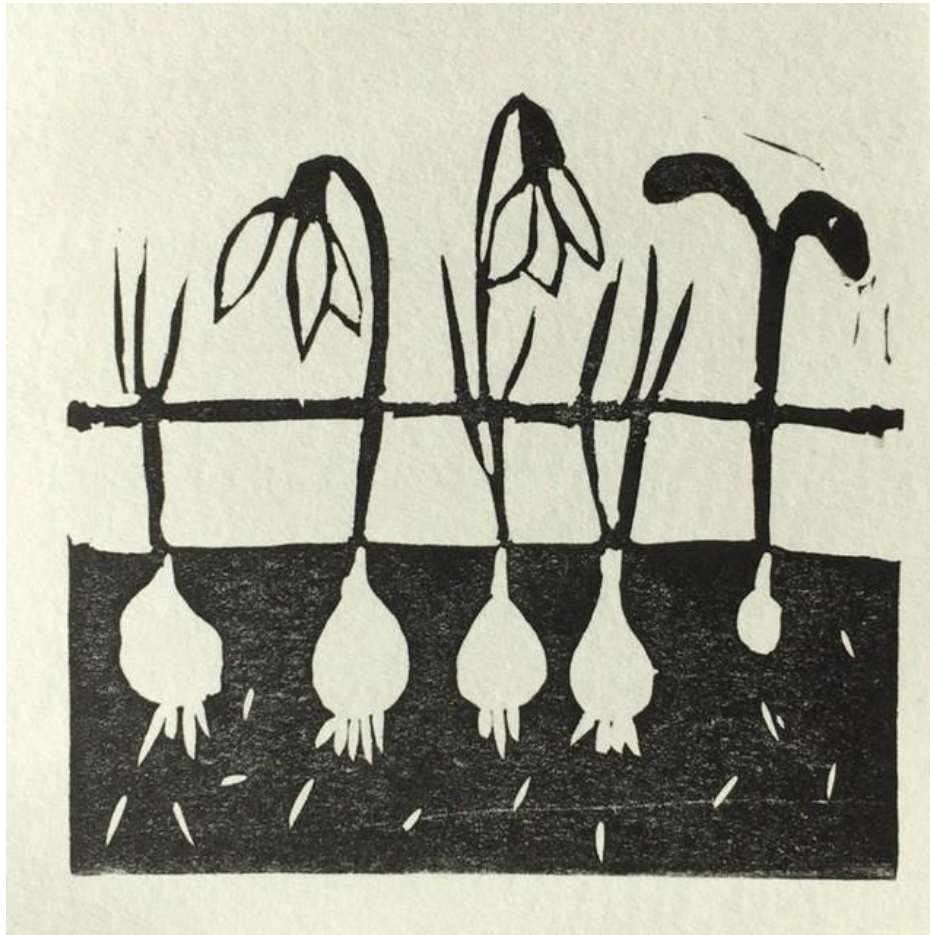
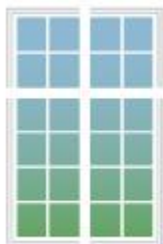


LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

APRIL 14 – APRIL 17



Hope by Terry Wise



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

April 14, 2022

Friends,

The project of gathering stories to form *Forty Stories of Hope: A Lenten Devotional* has been a joy! I'm grateful to the Board of Christian Education for endorsing the project, and to the contributors who share these memorable moments of hope. Special thanks to Pastor Brent for his wisdom and generosity; to Will Garrison for his patience, creativity, and demanding work; and deep appreciation to Terry Wise for her artistry in making the cover with its hopeful snow drops emerging from the icy cold earth.

With love and thanks,

Elizabeth Young



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

THURSDAY APRIL 14

The Hope for Transformation

“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” John 13: 14. (NRSV)

I felt like Simon Peter when I took off my shoe and walked over to where Terry Wise was kneeling with a basin. I fight resistance, brain pounding like Peter’s: “No, you shall never wash my feet.” I remind myself that Jesus said to Peter, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

After Terry washed my foot, I put my shoe back on in the bumbling blindness of transformation. What had just happened to me? My brain had no answer.

The next year, transformation again; the need to sit silently in my car for a few minutes before driving home. The search for an explanation for the experience. I kept returning to maternal loving care. But I knew it was even more than that.

This year, I sign up to teach Sunday School when the lesson is about Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. I want the children to have that personal transformation I have had on Maundy Thursdays; I also hope they might help me understand what happens.

The children are fascinated by my kneeling before Tommy Wheat, whose feet don’t yet reach the ground from an adult chair. As I pour the water and dry his foot with a towel, I look up at him: his big brown eyes meet mine. Our eyes lock. Not Sunday School Teacher to Young Learner. Instead, soul with soul, together.

I make my way around the group of children. After the last foot has been washed, we talk about serving our friends, helping them when times are tough. As I get ready to stand up, a quiet voice says to me, “Thank you.” Willow, a twelve-year-old girl, whom I do not know. She too holds my gaze. Still in the role of servant, I feel myself held by the child.

Prayer: God, help me remember that when we kneel down to serve another, we are held by the Holy Spirit, and transformed by the divine mystery of love. Amen.



Elizabeth Young

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

FRIDAY APRIL 15

Hope in Lent

Twenty-four years ago, my husband John was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. His prognosis was not hopeful.

I had given up going to church years before but when some friends of mine from Hope Church in Lenox began praying for him, I decided to join them. My first visit to Hope Church was on Easter Sunday 1997. I was overcome with emotion when reminded of the hope in Christ and his death and the miracle of His resurrection. That hope carried us through the months ahead as we dealt with my husband's illness and death. We were hoping for a miracle of modern medicine but were left with the hope that Christ held us in his loving arms and that John was not gone forever.



The hope of Easter is just that for me: Jesus died on the cross, was buried in the tomb and was resurrected by God the Father. Our hope for a life beyond this earthly one so full of sadness, sickness and death is in Christ. We can live our life on earth with that in mind and live a life with Christ in the

present by giving ourselves to Him as much as possible every day. We can do this by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves and by not getting caught up in the ways and lures of the world.

I would be overcome with despair and depression if I relied on myself alone. Jesus is my hope for this world and the next. The hope of Jesus and Easter is here today for our hurting world and in our future forever.

Vicky Cooper

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

SATURDAY APRIL 16

Living with Hope

“Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better than a dead lion!” *Ecclesiastes 9:4.*

In 1986 my left leg was amputated above the knee. A few months later, a few more inches were removed. It was a shock to have to learn how to adapt. It was like my life had come to a sudden stop and I did not know how to get it going again. To be blunt, I was miserable, and I behaved in a negative way.

I was angry...very angry 😞. You can be sure that I felt very sorry for myself. I lashed out at everything and everybody. I had a classic case of the “Why me?” syndrome. However, I did not want to spend the rest of my life like this! I hoped for help and answers.

Three complete strangers came into my life. The first person, who had polio at age two, taught me that there is life after acquiring a disability. Madeline was married, had graduated from BCC, and was working. I currently take courses for fun, volunteer at the Clark Museum in Williamstown, go to plays and concerts.

The next person, JoAnn, demonstrated that I could live an independent life. She was the founder of the independent living center, Ad-Lib. I have lived in an apartment near the Pittsfield Common for 40 years; Shadow and I go on long walks around Pittsfield every day; and in summer we go to Onota Lake regularly.

The third person encouraged me to become a disability advocate, a role I continue to fulfill as occasions arise, and by serving on advisory boards, including the UCP Board of Directors for 30 years. Advocating for people with different abilities gives my life great purpose and meaning.

Hope is a big part of my life now, thanks to the guidance of others. I learned to thrive. My life is full, I look forward to each day, and when challenges confront me, I enjoy figuring out how to meet them!

Prayer: God, thank you for helping me discover how to say “Yes!” to a life I never imagined I’d have. Amen.

Pat Sheely

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2022 – HOPE

SUNDAY APRIL 17

An Easter Gift



Three years ago, on Easter Sunday our life changed utterly. We loaded bags of plastic eggs with little prizes into the back of the car, along with the child we had raised for almost a year and headed out to help celebrate Easter with her brothers and sister and mom. We created a large Easter egg hunt for the kids and watched as they joyfully ran from egg to egg, then sat on the porch to examine their prizes.

Hope for us was a fierce commitment to the present and doing everything we could to ease the way for a child in an impossible situation by strengthening the ties between her two families. We had also known hope-erasing grief when she left for the first overnight in her planned transition away from us.

As the children played, her mom took us aside and asked us the life-changing question: would we adopt this child we all loved so much? It was a question full of tears and promises and hope.

A year later, just after Easter, we did adopt our daughter via a Zoom court appearance at the beginning of a global pandemic. Loving in the face of uncertainty felt at the time like the unique burden of being foster parents, but I have since recognized it at the core of parenting and life more broadly. Sometimes hope is still a fierce commitment to the present.

Prayer: God, Let us all love the world's children with all our hearts. Amen.

Anna Duhon