

My Hope For FOH –Mary Shertz

I'm auditing Malinda's class on Suffering and Hope this semester and right now we're reading two novels by Octavia Butler—*The Parable of the Sower* and its sequel *The Parable of the Talents*. These are dystopian stories set in a time that begins with 2024. It is a time too close for comfort and the details are all too imaginable. These books are sober reading to be sure, but one commentator described the hope they offer as "a hard won and uneasy hope, the kind that actually means something."

We've talked a lot about hope this weekend—which stands to reason, given that we've called ourselves the Fellowship of Hope for fifty years. We also know, by now, that hope isn't easy and that, indeed, if it is too easy it doesn't mean much. Hope has driven us to our knees more than once in our fifty years—and sometimes proved elusive. But no one has suggested that we change our name, and so we persist, in hope and with hope's companion, courage, making our home here with other hoppers over the years and across the miles of God's faithfulness to us.

So my hope for FOH in the present and for the future is that we take heart in the courage of God and continue in this hard won hope—hope forged in the way of God with people, hope enacted in the ministry, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hope given life and breath by the spirit of God moving over the deep and enlivening the dry bones.

My favorite image for hope within our fellowship is our very youngest member, long before she could walk, making the somewhat precarious journey into the labyrinth that Rianna had constructed in the middle of our worship space that morning. With her own cloud of loving witnesses looking on, Chloe, with utter courage and complete audacity, made her way toward the heart of God.

With our own crowd of loving witnesses encircling us, let us continue in that clear eyed and open hearted hope. Let us continue to be a blessing for all those who enter our doors, for the neighborhood just outside our doors, and for the weary world that God loves so passionately. As Suella says, after every sermon she preaches, may it be so.