

A SEASON OF HOPE LENT

SMALL GROUP STUDY



So many of our neighbors around the world are longing to experience — to truly touch, hear, see, smell and taste — the hope that only Jesus can bring. We know that longing too. And we know that you are restless and eager to be Christ's hands and feet in a world reeling from hardship.

This Lent, gather a group of friends together — either online or in a socially distanced group — and join Lutheran World Relief for a 5-week Sensing Hope series that will engage you in Bible study and prayer and connect you to your global neighbors through a hands-on service activity.

This small group study will explore how each of our senses connects us to the love of Christ and to one another, and it invites you to assemble Personal Care Kits and share real, tangible hope with our poorest neighbors.

Everything you need to lead your group discussion is included in this document. Be sure to visit lwr.org/lent to explore our resources for making Personal Care Kits.

We hope you will join us in spreading Christ's love to usher in a new season: a season of hope.

To learn more about future opportunities to join Lutheran World Relief by rallying your friends and congregation to make a difference in the lives of your global neighbors, please contact Emma Wagner, congregational engagement associate, at 410 230 2749 or ewagner@lwr.org.



LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF



TOUCHING HOPE: Meeting urgent needs during COVID-19

Luke 7:1-10 | The faith of the Centurion

LEARN How your hope touches vulnerable neighbors during the pandemic

For people who live in the world's poorest communities, contracting COVID-19 is only the beginning of the risks they face during a pandemic.

In the Gandak River Basin that separates India and Nepal, communities are not only affected by the pandemic but also the flood season. People are afraid to leave their homes and contract the virus. People can't find work. Food is becoming scarce. Anisha Devi, 40, lives in India and supplies her family the only food they can afford and procure — the bread she makes at home. Vijay Singh, 38, says, "I hope that my children will be healthy and they'll be able to go back to school."

In Nairobi, Kenya, Peline Kemunto was overjoyed when she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Shortly after, the pandemic swept through Kenya, and Peline was faced with choosing between staying home to avoid COVID-19 or taking her child to the clinic for checkups and vaccines. Fewer mothers are receiving prenatal care or delivering their babies in a safe environment.

Lutheran World Relief adapted its existing projects so implementation can continue safely in the COVID era, ensuring the pandemic's economic impacts on families are mitigated and basic needs are met. Through local partners and community networks, your love is providing personal protective equipment, potable water installations and hygiene kits and distributing emergency food, food vouchers and cash transfers to the world's most vulnerable.

DISCUSS

1. How has your daily life been affected by COVID-19? In what ways has your life continued to be stable even amidst the pandemic?
2. Can you imagine making the choice between staying home or providing medical care for your family?
3. During the pandemic have members of your congregation connected to one another through technology? In what ways has this connection provided hope for you or others?



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TOUCH

Find an object in your home/office that is meaningful for you. It could be a small cross, a comforting blanket, your favorite mug, a well-loved book or Bible. Take a few minutes and feel the object. How does it feel in your hands? Take a few deep breaths and feel God's presence. Listen for God's voice of comfort, hope and grace. Listen for God's voice calling you beloved.

BIBLE STUDY Luke 7:1-10

What does hope feel like? Does it feel like water rushing down your face, warm hands to hold, a hot compress on your back or renewed energy? In this week's Bible reading we hear a healing story that doesn't include Jesus physically touching the person he heals. A centurion sends some others to Jesus seeking healing for his servant. Jesus is not even in the same room as the centurion's slave. Rather, Jesus hears the cries and the faith of the centurion, and in his amazement, offers healing. Read Luke 7:1-10.

1. For whom in your life have you sought healing?
2. How have you and your congregation been able to connect with one another and the wider community without being together physically? What creative ways of being church have emerged?
3. Who are the healers in your community? How can you support their work?

PRAY

God of endless love, we give thanks for people who come to you seeking healing for others. We give thanks for friends who speak up and bring attention to the cries of our neighbors. Help us to seek out those in need of healing. Teach us to use more than just our hands to offer hope. Lift up our voices, open our hearts, and remind us to see all your people as beloved. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One who is our hope.

SHARE YOUR LOVE

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HEARING HOPE: Spreading hope after the Beirut explosion

Mark 7:31-37 | Jesus heals a deaf and mute man

LEARN How your hope can be heard by neighbors in Beirut

On August 4, 2020, at 6:06 p.m. a deadly explosion altered lives in Beirut, Lebanon, when ammonium nitrate exploded, causing one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever. Two hundred people were killed, 300,000 were forced from their homes and many parts of the city were devastated.

Émile Naaman, 87 years old, had lived in his house for 60 years. He spent his life working as a hairdresser and also played guitar in the band of a famous Arabic singer. When the blast hit, he was in the kitchen making tea. Fortunately, he was bending down slightly, and the heavy wooden door narrowly missed him as it flew off. He told Lutheran World Relief's director of humanitarian assistance that his life was saved and protected that day. His home sustained significant damage, and he relies on food donations.

On one city street, banners occasionally flutter above the rubble, emblazoned with words of resilience: WE ARE STAYING, in English and Arabic. In the aftermath of the blast and an ongoing political and economic crisis, your love is providing quilts, food and critical home repairs for families like Emile's.

LISTEN

Watch this video that shows the destruction in Beirut and the impact of your love. Pay attention to the music that you hear throughout the video.



DISCUSS

1. What did you hear in the music? How did you feel when you heard it?
2. Have you ever heard an explosion? What's the loudest sound you've heard? What do you imagine it would be like to be cooking in your kitchen one minute, and the next to be thrown down from the blast's force?
3. What signs of hope did you notice in the video?



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BIBLE STUDY Mark 7:31-37

What does hope sound like? Is it the sound of laughter, children's voices, friends calling to say hello, birds singing or cries for justice? In this week's Bible reading from the Gospel of Mark, we encounter a man who couldn't hear.

Prior to this part of the story, news of Jesus' healings was spreading. People were hearing about Jesus and the hope he proclaimed. In this healing story it's important to note that Jesus doesn't encounter this man on his own, but rather the man is brought to him. For this man, both deaf and mute, his healing occurs because someone cared enough to bring him to Jesus.

Read Mark 7:31-37.

Once the man is healed and his sight and hearing are restored, Jesus "ordered them to tell no one." Yet, we know the rest of the story. The people did keep telling of Jesus' deeds. The people did keep coming to Jesus. The people did keep telling the story of Jesus' hope and healing. The disciples who saw Jesus heal the deaf and mute man were "astounded beyond measure." How astounding would it be if our congregations were continually opened to the needs around them?

1. As Jesus heals the man, he looks up to heaven and sighs. Where do you hear the sigh of God's people? What makes you sigh and look to Jesus for hope?
2. What challenges are you not seeing in your community? Do a brief search in your local news source for challenges in your community that you may have overlooked. Where do you need your eyes to be opened to see God's presence and the needs of God's people?
3. Even in the midst of the challenges you have faced, for what have you been astounded beyond measure?

PRAY

Astounding God, your hope is whispered to us daily. Help us to hear your words of love and grace. Teach us to use our voices to offer words of hope to others. When our lives are out of control, may we hear your words: Be opened. Guide us to listen to the cries of our neighbors, and show us how to walk together towards healing. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One who is our hope.

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SEEING HOPE: Restoring hope after Hurricanes Eta and Iota in Central America

Mark 10:46-52 | Bartimaeus Sees

LEARN Where hope is shared following natural disasters

Our neighbors in Central America had already been affected by rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases and put in lockdown, on top of the challenges of a weakening economy. All of that was before two devastating hurricanes made landfall within just two weeks of each other this past November: Hurricanes Eta and Iota. Our neighbors in Central America saw 145 mph maximum sustained winds along with three feet of rainfall. As a result, rivers and streams flooded over, electricity was out, landslides blocked access to already isolated villages, bridges collapsed, roads were shut down and both small towns and large cities faced threats of massive flash floods. Homes were destroyed and livelihoods, too.

When you listen to the stories of our neighbors, you see people like Maritsa Morales. “I was told to evacuate, but I have five kids and a mother-in-law in a wheelchair,” she said. “How am I supposed to evacuate?” She eventually made her way to Centre Basico Fidelina Cerros where she shelters, caring for her children and helping her mother-in-law while her husband works as a day laborer.

You also see Ernesto Lemus, who woke up to the sound of water rushing through his home at 4 a.m. “We knew the storm was coming, but it got here earlier than we expected.”

He saw 12 inches of mud and raw sewage coursing through his home.

VISIO DIVINA Praying with our eyes



Look at the photo of the tractor transporting evacuees through rushing water in Jerusalem, Honduras. Take a few minutes to notice what you see - the colors, the scenery, the faces. Where do you see hope in the picture? After a few minutes of silence and prayerful looking, offer a prayer.



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DISCUSS

1. Talk about the power of water. What memories and stories do you have related to water (drinking, cleaning, visiting a lake or the ocean, etc.)
2. What signs of hope do you see in the photo above?
3. Who in your community is not being seen? In what ways can your congregation open their eyes, homes and hearts to neighbors and strangers this Lent?

BIBLE STUDY Mark 10:46-52

What does hope look like? Does it look like clean water, flourishing fields, a rainbow, strangers listening to one another? Do you see hope in our world or do you only see obstacles to overcome? Do you look towards Jesus to be our hope? In today's lesson, we witness Bartimaeus seeing hope in Jesus. But first, imagine Bartimaeus by the side of the road, begging. Can you imagine the life he led that brought him to beg for food and water? Bartimaeus keeps shouting for Jesus to take notice. He's told to be quiet, but he persists even more. He lifts his voice. He wants to be seen. Jesus comes to him, asks what he wants and restores his sight. Read Mark 10:46-52.

1. What signs of hope do you see in the Bible reading? Who do you see in your own life that brings you hope?
2. How does your wider community see your congregation? What would they tell others about your work and ministry?
3. Who in your community is not being seen?

PRAY

God who sees our hearts and the fullness of our lives, we give thanks to you. Teach us to see the beauty of creation and the diversity of your people. Open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors. Keep us turning to you, our hope and salvation. Keep us steadfast in seeking you. You call us beloved; may we see all as your children and worthy of love and hope. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One who is our hope.

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SMELLING HOPE: Reclaiming hope in Zambia for those in poverty

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 | The Aroma of Christ
John 12:1-8 | Mary Anoints Jesus

LEARN How your hope provides warmth and comfort for neighbors in Zambia

Through Lutheran World Relief, your love helps communities in East Africa get more out of the agricultural value chain. Currently, in Zambia, communities are not only affected by the pandemic but also by poverty. While Zambia is one of the more stable and developed countries in Africa, many people live without access to basic necessities. Quilts are among the basic needs many Zambians lack. Zambia is one of the colder African countries. Bedding is expensive and many families sleep in the cold.

Lutheran World Relief recently distributed LWR quilts and Baby Care Kits, clothing and food to meet as many needs as possible. The LWR shipment was delivered to a rural village called Mazambani, located in the southern province. Distributions have been difficult due to COVID-19, but these items were never needed more than during this global pandemic. The village leaders told our local team that most of their community had never heard of or seen such a thing (referring to all the supplies handed out) in their lifetime.

SMELL

Light a scented candle. Take time to smell the flame and sit with its fragrance.

DISCUSS

1. What did you notice as you sat and smelled the candle's scent? What stories came to your mind that connected with the smell of the candle?
2. What might hope smell like? What signs of hope are experienced when quilts are given to families around the world?

BIBLE STUDY 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 & John 12:1-8

What does hope smell like? Does it smell like incense rising, coffee brewing, a garden's bounty, your grandmother's kitchen or newly-fallen rain? What about smells that turn us away? Does a foul smell point us away from hope and beauty? Do we turn away from things that make us nauseous? In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul shares how God and smell can be connected in our life of faith: "We are the aroma of Christ to God."



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In today's lesson, Mary anoints Jesus's feet with costly perfume, filling the house with the fragrance. Mary offers a gift, one that is pleasing to the senses, and one that foretells Jesus' death. Mary shows us the power of connection to Jesus through the use of fragrant oil. One of the symptoms of COVID-19 involves the loss of smell. When we lose our sense of smell we can feel disconnected from our bodies and the world around us.

1. Paul writes: "We are the aroma of Christ to God." What do you think of those words? Have you ever connected smell to your faith?
2. Have you or someone you've known lost their sense of smell? What was the experience like?
3. Mary offers an extravagant gift to Jesus by anointing his feet with perfume. Recall a time where you gave or received an extravagant gift.

PRAY

God of love and grace, may we use our hands to bless and heal others. Like Mary offering the pleasing fragrance of perfume, help us to reach out to others with gifts pleasing to the senses: bread, warm drinks, flowers. Teach us to look for signs of your presence in warm blankets, the smell of a candle and friends who listen to us. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, the One who is our hope.

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TASTING HOPE: Bringing safety and refuge to refugees in Syria

Ruth | Ruth and Naomi

LEARN How your love provides safety for refugees

Fatime, a widow and mother, packed her belongings and took her family to join thousands of neighbors fleeing Syria's civil war, setting out on a brutal 430-mile journey to a refugee camp in Lebanon.

When they arrived, they instantly realized how harsh life was going to be. Disease, sickness, hunger, death and a tent-like dwelling were what they faced in this foreign land.

Winter is hardest for refugees like Fatime and her daughters, and it's especially brutal for families with young children and newborns. Nearly half of all refugees are children and infants. During the long cold winters, food is harder to come by, and freezing winds whip through the old vinyl billboards and tattered canvas Fatime had used to construct two tiny rooms on a concrete slab. Water pours through the roof like a sieve as the family huddles together in a shivering sleep.

Another refugee, Amar Hamwi, remembers the bombs, too. "I saw people dying in front of me," he said. "We finally left." A reaction to medicine as a child paralyzed his right leg, but it did not hinder the family's journey nearly 200 miles from Idlib, Syria, to Riyaq. He worked as a driver in Syria and was fortunate enough to find a job upholstering furniture once he, his wife and their five children found a place to rent. As Lebanon's economy faltered, so did the demand for new

furniture. Hamwi lost his job, and the family has fallen six months behind on rent for their flat above a filling station on Riyaq's busy main road. "Even people with two working legs aren't working," he said. The family's sons had jobs in a curtain shop, but coronavirus lockdowns put them out of work, leaving the family without income. "I don't know what I'll do," Hamwi said. "I'm very worried. I just want to go home."

TASTE

Take a few moments to think about your favorite meal. Where did you eat it? Who was with you? What made it special – was it the food itself, or was it also about the experience of fellowship, the feeling of blessing or the hands that prepared it?

DISCUSS

1. What's the longest walk you've taken? What challenges did you face? Think about refugees who take only what's on their back and walk for days or weeks searching for safety and peace.
2. How has food been a way for you to experience God's hope?
3. How has your congregation used food to meet the needs of your community and share hope?



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BIBLE STUDY Ruth 1

What does hope taste like? Does it taste like bread and wine, a meal shared with family at the dining room table, the first sip of morning coffee, a piece of chocolate? In today's lesson from Ruth we learn that hope looks like walking towards a country in search of food and being in community with others. The book of Ruth begins with a famine. In the first chapter alone we read about both hunger and death, but also the commitment between Ruth and Naomi, mother and daughter-in-law. Ruth travels loyally with Naomi, and during this journey she is referred to as Ruth the Moabite, emphasizing her foreignness.

As we move closer to Holy Week and Easter, our congregations are still affected by the ongoing pandemic. Many have lost friends and family to the pandemic, as well as the loss of relationships in light of our current political realities. Many in our country are famished — emotionally, spiritually and physically. Reading the first chapter of Ruth we begin with famine but end with a harvest; we move from emptiness to fullness. How can we recognize that same movement in our congregations and acknowledge the depth of emotions experienced.

1. Chapter 1 begins with a famine and ends during the barley harvest. Where in your life have you experienced emptiness? Where have you experienced fullness? What was the journey like between the two?
2. Ruth displays remarkable loyalty to Naomi. Reflect on your relationships. Who has been loyal to you and where have you shown loyalty? Give thanks to God for faithful friends.
3. Who in your community is experiencing hunger? How can your congregation support them?

PRAY

God of goodness and grace, we come to you hungry for your presence. We desire to know you more, and to feel your love. We give thanks for friendships that sustain us and accompany us through life. Teach us to be friends who offer time, food and compassion. Show us how to be people who walk with others towards safety, healing and hope. Teach us to extend our tables to welcome all to feast on your Word. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the One we long for in this season of hope.

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