

First Sunday of Advent

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.—Isaiah 64:1 NRSV

Explore

guest

The Clay and the Potter

If a local potter is available, invite them to talk to the class about the process of turning a lump of clay into a useful vessel and about their faith as it relates to their gifts and abilities working with clay. Even better, make this a field trip to a potter's studio, and watch them in action. Then meet at a coffee shop or restaurant for breakfast and continue the lesson.

Extract

Bible

Isaiah 64:1–9
Psalm 80

Wait in Hope

Read Isaiah 64:1–9. The small group of Israelites had returned to their homeland from their captivity in Babylon. What they found was not the home they had left but a nation needing rebuilding. In their despair they cried out to God who had heard the prayers of their ancestors. Out of their struggle and desperation, they found hope in God's faithfulness and mercy. They cried,

“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.”

—Isaiah 64:8 NRSV

The Israelites in their despair grew into a new relationship with God asking for the ability to meet the challenges they would face. Ask several volunteers to read Psalm 80, a section at a time. It is a lament from earlier Hebrew history about the absence of God's presence among them and the cry for God's return. Find the verses that show the people's willingness to wait and faith in God's power to restore their hope.

Hope is God's
tool transforming
our lives.

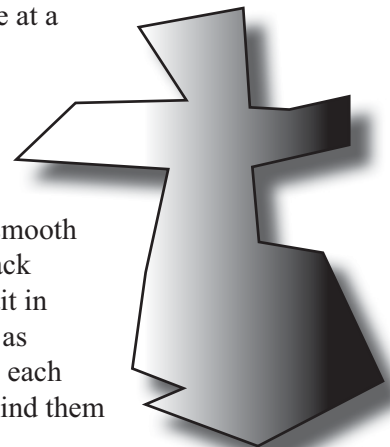
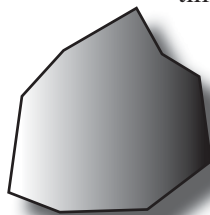
Experience

clay

Symbols of Hope

Give each student a ball of clay, and ask them to visualize what their experience tells them God wants them to become. Ask: How do you see God molding you, gently stretching you, guiding you to your fullest potential? Then ask them to shape their clay into a symbol of hope, a symbol that represents what God is doing in their life.

We choose to let God shape us; we allow one thumb stroke at a time. God's powerful hands gently caress our unrefined form and slowly tug and pull us into the human creation we were created to be. When we resist, God's gentle, steady stroke sometimes becomes firm in order to smooth our rough edges—encouraging us back into shape. In this season of Advent, we wait in hope of God's coming blessings working in and through us as we transform ourselves and the world in which we live. Let each student share their clay symbol of hope and how it will remind them of God in their life.



Creating Hope

There are several steps in making a piece of pottery. Some of the steps include throwing the clay on the wheel, trimming the piece, firing the piece, glazing the piece, and refiring the piece. When a potter starts the process of making something, they have an idea or hope of what they will build. Using the following terms, have a discussion on the word “hope.”

1. When a potter throws clay, they are building something and have hope that it will turn out. What do you think are the hopes of Christ?
2. After a piece of clay has hardened to a leathery texture, it is trimmed and pieces are removed. What are some things that you believe need removing in the world for Christ’s peace to be a reality?
3. The process of firing bonds and hardens the clay into a permanent shape. What do you believe Christ’s hope or vision is for the world?

Ask students to write their thoughts about hope and respond to the above questions.

paper, pens or pencils

Without Hope

Tape a large world map to the wall of the classroom. Distribute small sticky-notes to the students and have extras available. Also provide a display of current news magazines and newspapers. Direct students to place sticky-notes on the map where people may live without hope. If students are slow to respond, discuss current issues in the news—wars, natural disasters, robberies, child abuse, corruption. Tell the class to stand back and survey the map.

tape, world map, small sticky-notes, news magazines, newspapers, pens

Discuss the events students were thinking about as they attached the notes to the map. Following the discussion, provide each student with a pen, and ask them to write a simple prayer on a sticky-note for a change from despair to hope for those areas the notes represent and for God’s intervention in that situation.

Become an Instrument of Hope

Hope is active expectation. As we approach the anniversary of the first appearance of Jesus Christ, let us remember the hope that Jesus has brought to the hearts of sinners and believers alike for centuries. Let us remember that Jesus is the embodiment of the hope of God. Give as Jesus did, and make it a point in your life to be hope to someone who is in need of it. Our gifts, both physical and spiritual, help us do God’s work. Paul said those who accept Christ are sustained by hope. Read his discussion in Romans 8:22–25. Look for God’s gifts already present within. During this season of hope, how can students bring hope to others? Discuss and list the possibilities. Suggestions might include providing child care for parents while they go shopping, teaching Christmas carols to younger children, taking a senior citizen shopping, singing or providing a Christmas worship for a convalescent facility, doing yard work, or helping people decorate their homes. Select activities to do as individuals or as a group.

flip chart, markers

Advent wreath, lighter, songs of hope

Expand

Advent

Have students suggest songs of hope to sing, and close with several prayers of hope for the coming week and the Christmas season.