

# I Believe Even When

## Fill the Night with Music and Light

Advent Film Festival 2020

### **Small Group Curriculum**

The theme for Advent and Christmas this year focuses on the power of music in our lives and in the history of humanity. Song and singing together has always been a way that communities feel connected and empowered together. We certainly have been experiencing the loss of not making music together as a church for a while. So this theme will help us dive deeper into our appreciation of music and its role in our lives.

The films in this series were chosen because they tell powerful stories of people who were uplifted by music in very difficult times. Some are historic, some are current. all are relevant to the times in which we live.

Please note that these films are not suited for young children because they depict some disturbing times in history or difficult lives. There is also a Film Festival just for children as part of this series. The materials can be downloaded from the church website.

We hope that our experience of these stories  
and our celebration of the power of music  
will lift up our hearts in this holiday season.

### **Some Notes for Small Groups:**

We're glad you are delving deeper into our Advent season together with this small group study! Through five sessions, we will journey through this amazing collection of films. We recommend groups of 7 – 9 people gather together for about an hour each week during the series. If you are meeting in a larger group via Zoom, we recommend using breakout rooms so ensure manageable and open conversation with less than 10 people. The videos are accessible either for rent or purchase on Amazon Prime Video or on YouTube. We recommend that you ask participants to view the films each week prior to the group gathering. This group study is scripted so that anyone in the group can be in the role of leader on any week with minimal preparation other than viewing the films.

#### Materials Needed:

- Computer with internet connection and good sound
- Paper or notebook, pen or pencil
- Candle and matches
- Copy of the curriculum
- Clock or watch to keep track of time

#### Gathering Schedule:

- First minutes—Gather via zoom and settle in
- 3 to 4 minutes—Opening time with candle, scripture, prayer and introduction read aloud
- 30-35 minutes—Group discussion (all together or in breakout rooms)
- 2-3 minutes—Personal silent reflection or journaling on final question
- Last minutes—Share “I believe” sentence reflections and close with prayer

# Week 1—Defiant Requiem

## Advent 1—I Believe in the Sun: Hope for Tomorrow

For more information, visit <https://www.defiantrequiem.org>.

The entire movie is available through Amazon Prime Video. If you have trouble accessing the movie, please contact Pastor Teresa ([tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org](mailto:tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org)). The church has an Amazon Prime account.

### Before Watching the Film:

Once everyone is ‘gathered,’ light a candle, then read aloud the scripture passages and pray the prayer for the day.

Isaiah 40:1-11

*Comfort, comfort my people!  
says your God.*

*<sup>2</sup> Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,  
that her penalty has been paid,  
that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins!*

*<sup>3</sup> A voice is crying out:*

*“Clear the LORD’s way in the desert!  
Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!*

*<sup>4</sup> Every valley will be raised up,  
and every mountain and hill will be flattened.  
Uneven ground will become level,  
and rough terrain a valley plain.*

*<sup>5</sup> The LORD’s glory will appear,  
and all humanity will see it together;  
the LORD’s mouth has commanded it.”*

*<sup>6</sup> A voice was saying:*

*“Call out!”  
And another<sup>[a]</sup> said,  
“What should I call out?”*

*All flesh is grass;  
all its loyalty is like the flowers of the field.*

*<sup>7</sup> The grass dries up  
and the flower withers  
when the LORD’s breath blows on it.  
Surely the people are grass.*

*<sup>8</sup> The grass dries up;  
the flower withers,  
but our God’s word will exist forever.*

*<sup>9</sup> Go up on a high mountain,  
messenger Zion!*

*Raise your voice and shout,  
messenger Jerusalem!*

*Raise it; don’t be afraid;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”*

*<sup>10</sup> Here is the LORD God,  
coming with strength,*

*with a triumphant arm,  
bringing his reward with him  
and his payment before him.  
11 Like a shepherd, God will tend the flock;  
he will gather lambs in his arms  
and lift them onto his lap.  
He will gently guide the nursing ewes.*

Mark 1:1-15

*The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, 2 happened just as it was written about in the prophecy of Isaiah:  
Look, I am sending my messenger before you.  
He will prepare your way,  
3 a voice shouting in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way for the Lord;  
make his paths straight."<sup>[a]</sup>  
4 John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. 5 Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. 6 John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."  
9 About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. 10 While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. 11 And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."  
12 At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.  
14 After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, 15 saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"*

Prayer of the Day:

Gracious God, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.  
Open us to your hope in the scripture we have read and in our own lives.  
In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction to the film (read aloud):

This first week's film is called "Defiant Requiem." It was chosen because the theme song for our worship series "I Believe" is based on an anonymous poem, believed to be written by a Jewish person hiding from the Nazis in the 1940's. This week's documentary is also about that time period.

Defiant Requiem highlights the most dramatic example of intellectual and artistic courage in the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Concentration Camp during World War II: the remarkable story of Rafael Schächter, a brilliant, young Czech conductor who was arrested and sent to Terezín in 1941. He demonstrated moral leadership under the most brutal circumstances, determined to sustain courage and hope for his fellow prisoners by enriching their souls through great music. His most extraordinary act was to recruit 150 prisoners and teach them Verdi's Requiem by

rote in a dank cellar using a single score, over multiple rehearsals, and after grueling days of forced labor. The Requiem was performed on 16 occasions for fellow prisoners. The last, most infamous performance occurred on June 23, 1944 before high-ranking SS officers from Berlin and the International Red Cross to support the charade that the prisoners were treated well and flourishing.

**Discussion Questions-** (Use these questions as a guide, or discuss what stood out in the film)

Help establish the trusted space by reading this invitation aloud:

*“In our conversation, everyone is invited to share, but sharing is not required. Please make room for all voices. Whatever is said here stays here—not because we are telling secrets but because we honor that what a person says here is their story to share.*

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. The conductor stated, “when common language can’t get even close to what it is we’re feeling, that’s when art begins.” Have you had an experience where art - whether it be music or another art form - has expressed what you are feeling more than words could?
3. One survivor from Schächter’s choir said that during the time of their performances they were “dancing under the gallows.” What do you think hope looks and feels like when facing such fear?
4. “Libera me” of Verdi’s Requiem includes,  
*Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death on that awful day,  
When the heavens and the earth shall be moved:  
When you will come to judge the world by fire.  
I tremble, and I fear the judgment and the wrath to come,  
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved.  
The day of wrath, that day of calamity and misery;  
a great and bitter day, indeed.  
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,  
and may perpetual light shine upon them.*

What might these words have meant to those in Terezín? How might this meaning have been different from our understanding?

### **Individual Reflection:**

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the chorus at Terezin might have used to complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe \_\_\_\_\_, even when \_\_\_\_\_.”

*You may add something like, “while silence during online gatherings may feel awkward, let it be a space where the Spirit meets us—even in this place.” You could choose to play soft music—without words—during this time.*

### **Share Reflection:**

Invite participants to share their ‘I Believe’ sentences if they would like to do so. Only share the sentence so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of untiring hope. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when our view is obscured by clouds of doubt, ignite the flame of hope within us, that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out.

## **Week 2—Girls on the Wall**

### **Advent 2—I Believe in Love: Daring Right Relationships**

To view the movie trailer on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9QsEj3KPAo>

Please be advised that this film has very strong language. We encourage you to embrace the language as an act of deeper love and listen for greater understanding. Do not dismiss this film too soon.

The movie is available for rent on Amazon Prime Video for \$1.99. If you have trouble accessing the movie, please contact Pastor Teresa ([tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org](mailto:tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org)). The church has an Amazon Prime account.

#### **Before the Film:**

Once everyone is ‘gathered,’ light a candle, read aloud the scripture and pray the prayer for the day.

Isaiah 7:1-14

*In the days of Ahaz (Jotham’s son and grandson of Judah’s King Uzziah), Aram’s King Rezin and Israel’s King Pekah (Remaliah’s son) came up to attack Jerusalem, but they couldn’t overpower it.*

*<sup>2</sup> When the house of David was told that Aram had become allies with Ephraim, their hearts and the hearts of their people shook as the trees of a forest shake when there is a wind. <sup>3</sup> But the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub,<sup>[a]</sup> at the end of the channel of the Upper Pool, by the road to the field where laundry is washed, <sup>4</sup> and say to him, ‘Be careful and stay calm. Don’t fear, and don’t lose heart over these two pieces of smoking torches, over the burning anger of Rezin, Aram, and Remaliah’s son. <sup>5</sup> Aram has planned evil against you with Ephraim and Remaliah’s son, saying, <sup>6</sup> “Let’s march up against Judah, tear it apart, capture it for ourselves, and install Tabeel’s son as its king.” <sup>7</sup> But the LORD God says: It won’t happen; it won’t take place. <sup>8</sup> The chief of Aram is Damascus; the chief of Damascus is Rezin (in sixty-five more years Ephraim will be shattered as a nation); <sup>9</sup> the chief of Ephraim is Samaria; and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you don’t believe this, you can’t be trusted.”*

*<sup>10</sup> Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup> “Ask a sign from the LORD your God. Make it as deep as the grave<sup>[b]</sup> or as high as heaven.”*

*<sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, “I won’t ask; I won’t test the LORD.”*

*<sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Isn’t it enough for you to be tiresome for people that you are also tiresome before my God? <sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Lord will give you a sign. The young woman is pregnant and is about to give birth to a son, and she will name him Immanuel.<sup>[c]</sup>*

Matthew 1:18-25

*<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Joseph her husband was a righteous man. Because he didn’t want to humiliate her, he decided to call off their engagement quietly. <sup>20</sup> As he was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don’t be afraid to take*

Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

<sup>23</sup> *Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,*

*And they will call him, Emmanuel.*<sup>[a]</sup>

(*Emmanuel* means “God with us.”)

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did just as an angel from God commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he didn’t have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. Joseph called him Jesus.

Prayer of the Day:

God-with-us, gather us in and center us in the Spirit’s presence.

Open us to your love in the scriptures we have read and in our own lives.

In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction to the film (read aloud):

In this second week’s film, *Girls on the Wall*, the teenage girls of Warrenville Prison are not your average delinquents. Having “graduated” from juvie to prison, these are the kids most likely to remain in the correctional system their whole lives. They are also some of the sharpest and most irrepressible young women you’ll meet. When the girls of this heartland prison are given an unlikely shot at redemption — the chance to write and stage a musical based on their lives — they must relive their crimes, reclaim their humanity, and take a first step toward breaking free of the prison system.

**Discussion Questions:** (Use these questions as a guide, or discuss what stood out in the film)

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. When the girls wrote their individual stories, Whitney was reluctant to share. But she eventually wrote about her father,

*“It say, ‘broken’ which many of us are*

*Then I just put, ‘you’re an Indian Giver, dog.*

*You just give me money, you take it back*

*That ain’t cool*

*You give me love, you take it back*

*That ain’t cool either*

*You were my life, my smile*

*Now all I do is think, what if you were a different man*

*You could’ve accomplished many things*

*But yet instead, you love that pipe first*

*You loved your broad the same as that*

*But never showed me love at all.”*

How do you think Whitney defines love? And what kind of love is she looking for from her father? Do you see this longing for love in her behavior toward others are well?

3. Our Gospel reading for this week includes background of Jesus’ family and of his birth. What do we know about the backgrounds of the girls in Warrenville Prison? Does that affect how we hear their stories? Does it affect how they are understood and accepted in society?

4. Mrs. Palidofsky mentions that there are risks in telling one’s story. What do you think are some of the risks? How do you think we can overcome those risks?

5. Over the course of Mrs. P's process, the girls took their own stories and together created one story for them to share in their musical. In what ways do we - in our lives, in our rituals, in our faith - blend our individual and collective stories?

### **Individual Reflection:**

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with how you think the girls in Warrenville Prison might complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe \_\_\_\_\_, even when \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Share Reflections:**

Invite participants to share their "I Believe" sentences if they would like to do so. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of daring love. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when we cannot yet see a better day when we will act like the human family we are, ignite the flame of love within us, that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out.

## **Week 3—Following the Ninth Advent 3—I Believe in God: Ode to Joy**

To view the movie trailer on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXs4u-jfKw8>

The entire film is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2pKvykQZCk&t=19s>  
If you have trouble accessing the movie, please contact Pastor Teressa ([tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org](mailto:tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org)).  
The church has a YouTube channel.

### **Before the Film:**

Once everyone is 'gathered,' light a candle, read aloud the scriptures, and pray the prayer of the day.

Isaiah 57:14-19

*It will be said: "Survey, survey; build a road!*

*Remove barriers from my people's road!"*

*<sup>15</sup> The one who is high and lifted up,  
who lives forever, whose name is holy, says:*

*I live on high, in holiness,  
and also with the crushed<sup>[a]</sup> and the lowly,  
reviving the spirit of the lowly,  
reviving the heart of those who have been crushed.<sup>[b]</sup>*

*<sup>16</sup> I won't always accuse,  
nor will I be enraged forever.  
It is my own doing that their spirit is exhausted—  
I gave them breath!*

*<sup>17</sup> I was enraged about their illegal profits;  
I struck them; in rage I withdrew from them.  
Yet they went on wandering wherever they wanted.*

*<sup>18</sup> I have seen their ways, but I will heal them.*

*I will guide them,  
and reward them with comfort.  
And for those who mourn,  
19 I will create reason for praise:<sup>[c]</sup>  
utter prosperity to those far and near,  
and I will heal them, says the LORD.*

Luke 1:1-4; 26-56

*Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us. 2 They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us. 3 Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus. 4 I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received.*

*26 When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, 27 to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" 29 She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. 31 Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. 33 He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."*

*34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"*

*35 The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. 36 Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. 37 Nothing is impossible for God."*

*38 Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

*39 Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. 40 She entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 With a loud voice she blurted out, "God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. 43 Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her."*

*46 Mary said,  
"With all my heart I glorify the Lord!*

*47 In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.*

*48 He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.*

*Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored  
49 because the mighty one has done great things for me.  
Holy is his name.*

*50 He shows mercy to everyone,  
from one generation to the next,  
who honors him as God.*

*51 He has shown strength with his arm.*

*He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.*

- 52 *He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones  
and lifted up the lowly.*
- 53 *He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty-handed.*
- 54 *He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,  
remembering his mercy,*
- 55 *just as he promised to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."*
- 56 *Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then returned to her home.*

Prayer of the Day:

Loving God, gather me in and center me in the Spirit's presence.  
Open me to your gift of joy in the scriptures I have read and in my own life.  
In Christ Jesus I pray. Amen.

Introduction to the Film (read aloud):

Filmed on four continents, this documentary film looks at the global impact of Beethoven's hymn to humanity, his battle cry of freedom, his Ninth Symphony. The Ninth was at Tienamen Square in the Spring of 1989 during the student revolt. The same year, when the Berlin Wall came down, the Ninth was there to amplify the celebrations. Under the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, women marched on torture prisons with the Ode To Joy as inspiration. And in Japan, the Ninth was there to repair and heal after the devastating Tsunami of 2011. Following The Ninth is both inspirational and hard-hitting, and a testament of hope.

**Discussion Questions:** (Use these questions as a guide, or discuss what stood out in the film)

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?

2. Billy Bragg reimagined Ode to Joy in his words:

*"See now like a phoenix rising from the rubble of the war,  
Hope of ages manifested, peace and freedom evermore.  
Brothers, sisters, stand together. Raise your voices now as one.  
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.  
Throw off now the chains of ancient bitterness and enmity.  
Hand in hand, let's walk together on the path of liberty.  
Hark! A new dawn is breaking. Raise your voices now as one.  
Though by history divided, reconciled in unison.*

*What's to be then, o my brothers? Sisters, what is in your hearts?  
Tell me now the hopes you harbor.  
What's the task and where to start?  
Though speak ten million voices, every word is understood.  
Furnish every heart with joy and banish all hatred for good."*

The word "joy" is not included in these lyrics until the end, but where else do you hear joy in this rendition?

3. The early Christian movement was an illegal movement at the time, and as an early Christian (much like those in this week's film who were part of movements for change), you could be punished for your allegiance. What motivated the early Christians to keep going? What motivated those who told their stories in *Following the Ninth*?

4. Throughout this film, this piece of music resonated throughout these four different events: at Tiananmen Square in 1989, in Chile, as the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, and in Japan each December following the tsunami. How did this piece resonate or relate to each event differently?

### **Individual Reflection:**

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those in the film - in China, in Chile, in Germany, or in Japan - might have used complete this statement ((and how would you?):

“I believe \_\_\_\_\_, even when \_\_\_\_\_.”

### **Share Reflections:**

Invite participants to share their “I Believe” sentences if they would like to do so. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of the depths of joy. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when we are not sure of your presence, ignite the flame of joy within us, that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out. Amen.

## **Week 4—Sweet Honey in the Rock: Raise Your Voice!**

### **Advent 4—I Believe in the Light: Illuminating Peace**

This film is available to rent on Amazon Video for \$1.99. If you have trouble accessing the movie, please contact Pastor Teresa ([tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org](mailto:tsivers@stpaulsithaca.org)). The church has an Amazon Prime account.

### **Before Watching the Film:**

Once everyone has ‘gathered,’ light a candle, read aloud the scriptures and pray the prayer of the day.

Isaiah 9:2-7

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.*

*On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.*

*<sup>3</sup> You have made the nation great;  
you have increased its joy.*

*They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest,  
as those who divide plunder rejoice.*

*<sup>4</sup> As on the day of Midian, you’ve shattered the yoke that burdened them,  
the staff on their shoulders,  
and the rod of their oppressor.*

*<sup>5</sup> Because every boot of the thundering warriors,  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned, fuel for the fire.*

*<sup>6</sup> A child is born to us, a son is given to us,  
and authority will be on his shoulders.  
He will be named*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

*<sup>7</sup> There will be vast authority and endless peace  
for David’s throne and for his kingdom,*

*establishing and sustaining it  
with justice and righteousness  
now and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of heavenly forces will do this.*

John 1:1-18

*In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.  
2 The Word was with God in the beginning.  
3 Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word  
nothing came into being.  
What came into being  
4 through the Word was life,<sup>[a]</sup>  
and the life was the light for all people.  
5 The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.  
6 A man named John was sent from God. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning  
the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. 8 He himself wasn't  
the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.  
9 The true light that shines on all people  
was coming into the world.  
10 The light was in the world,  
and the world came into being through the light,  
but the world didn't recognize the light.  
11 The light came to his own people,  
and his own people didn't welcome him.  
12 But those who did welcome him,  
those who believed in his name,  
he authorized to become God's children,  
13 born not from blood  
nor from human desire or passion,  
but born from God.  
14 The Word became flesh  
and made his home among us.  
We have seen his glory,  
glory like that of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.  
15 John testified about him, crying out, "This is the one of whom I said, 'He who comes  
after me is greater than me because he existed before me.'"  
16 From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace;  
17 as the Law was given through Moses,  
so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ.  
18 No one has ever seen God.  
God the only Son,  
who is at the Father's side,  
has made God known.*

Prayer of the Day:

God of hope and love and joy, gather us in and center us in the Spirit's presence.  
Open us to your peace in the scriptures we have read and in our own lives.

In Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Introduction to the Film (read aloud):

A description of this week's film, from the Director, Stanley Nelson: Emerging from the strong tradition of Freedom Singers, Sweet Honey in the Rock is a group that's as soulfully rich as it is provocative. Using song to stand in unison, five African American women sing solely a cappella, along with a sign language translator. Their music evokes stories from the past, encourages introspection in the present, and inspires progress for the future. Since it was founded in 1973, over twenty different women have contributed to the Grammy Award-winning group's distinct sound, which embraces semblances of gospel, blues, and hip hop, all with a political tone. The film features a trove of concert and rehearsal footage as it follows the group on their thirtieth anniversary tour, which is also coincidentally when founder Bernice Johnson Reagon announces she will retire. Through a variety of interviews with members, historians, and fellow artists, the film explores the roots of Sweet Honey in the Rock's existence and influence.

**Discussion Questions:** (Use these questions as a guide, or discuss what stood out in the film)

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. Is a story told differently when shared in song? Is a story heard differently when experienced in song? How so?
3. One of Sweet Honey in the Rock's classic pieces is "Ella's Song." This piece, with words from freedom fighter Ella Baker, was set to music by Bernice Johnson Reagon, and released in 1988:

*We who believe in freedom cannot rest  
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes  
Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons  
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons  
That which touches me most  
Is that I had a chance to work with people  
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me  
To me young people come first  
They have the courage where we fail  
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale."*

What words still resonate over 30 years later? What could they teach us about peace today and what we are called to do in this moment?

4. Part of this film was the story of how Bernice Johnson Reagon, who had been with Sweet Honey in the Rock since the beginning, moves on to retirement. Even though she is the only remaining original member, the group remains strong as she passes the torch. What does it take to build something that lives beyond your involvement? How does the group move forward, and how could this be a model for discerning transition, change, and leadership?

**Individual Reflections:**

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that those who Sweet Honey in the Rock first sang to might have used complete this statement (and how would you?):

"I believe \_\_\_\_\_, even when \_\_\_\_\_."

## Share Reflections:

Invite participants to share their “I Believe” sentences if they would like to do so. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

## Closing Prayer:

Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of peace on earth. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when we aren’t sure that goodwill among us can be found, ignite the flame of peace within us, that we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out.

## Week 5—The Singing Revolution Christmas 1—Believe This: The Time Has Come

Watch the movie trailer on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4njksFKyycY>

Available for rent on Vimeo on Demand for \$3.99:  
<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thesingingrevolution>

Or on Amazon Prime Video for \$3.99.

See bonus features here: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/thesingingrevolution/191714261?autoplay=1>  
More information: <https://singingrevolution.com/about-the-film#the-filmmakers>

Once everyone is ‘gathered,’ light a candle, read aloud the scripture and pray the prayer of the day.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

*I surely rejoice in the LORD;  
my heart is joyful because of my God,  
because he has clothed me with clothes of victory,  
wrapped me in a robe of righteousness  
like a bridegroom in a priestly crown,  
and like a bride adorned in jewelry.*  
<sup>11</sup> *As the earth puts out its growth,  
and as a garden grows its seeds,  
so the LORD God will grow righteousness and praise before all the nations.*  
**62** *For Zion’s sake I won’t keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still  
until her righteousness shines out like a light,  
and her salvation blazes like a torch.*  
<sup>2</sup> *Nations will see your righteousness,  
all kings your glory.  
You will be called by a new name,  
which the LORD’s own mouth will determine.*  
<sup>3</sup> *You will be a splendid garland in the LORD’s hand,  
a royal turban in the palm of God’s hand.*

Luke 2:22-40

<sup>22</sup> *When the time came for their ritual cleansing, in accordance with the Law from Moses, they brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. (<sup>23</sup> It’s written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord.”) <sup>24</sup> They offered a sacrifice in keeping with what’s stated in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.<sup>[a]</sup>*

*25 A man named Simeon was in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He eagerly anticipated the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he wouldn't die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 Led by the Spirit, he went into the temple area. Meanwhile, Jesus' parents brought the child to the temple so that they could do what was customary under the Law. 28 Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God. He said, 29 "Now, master, let your servant go in peace according to your word, 30 because my eyes have seen your salvation. 31 You prepared this salvation in the presence of all peoples. 32 It's a light for revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." 33 His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. 34 Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your innermost being too." 36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, who belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was very old. After she married, she lived with her husband for seven years. 37 She was now an 84-year-old widow. She never left the temple area but worshipped God with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 She approached at that very moment and began to praise God and to speak about Jesus to everyone who was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. 39 When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. 40 The child grew up and became strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.*

Prayer of the Day:

Creator God, gather me in and center me in the Spirit's presence.

Open me to your promise in the scripture I have read and in my own life.

In Christ Jesus I pray. Amen.

Introduction to the Film (read aloud):

Most people don't think about singing when they think about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when, between 1987 and 1991, Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. During those years, hundreds of thousands gathered in fields to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to rally for independence. The Singing Revolution documents how the Estonian people regained their freedom and helped topple the Soviet Union along the way.

**Discussion Questions:** (Use these questions as a guide, or discuss what stood out in the film)

1. What was a particular moment or scene that surprised you or that resonated with you?
2. The film states that heroes in Estonia are different from how much of the world defines a hero. "In Estonia, fairy tale heroes are not brave noblemen who slay dragons and save damsels. Their hero is the shrewd old barn keeper who sits by the fire, waits, watches, and acts only when the time is right." How does this model of a hero help Estonians through these times? How do our current cultural models of heroes affect us? What can we learn from the Estonians' type of hero?
3. The Estonian National Anthem "Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm" was written in the 19th century and later set to music.

*“My fatherland is my love, and I want to rest,  
I lay into your arms, my sacred Estonia!  
Your birds will sing me to sleep,  
you will bloom flowers from my ashes,  
my fatherland, my fatherland!”*

How do these words evoke hope, love, joy, and peace? And with this, how do these words sustain a revolutionary movement?

4. The prophet Isaiah says, “for Zion’s sake I won’t stay silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still.” Do you see this refusal to stay silent in the people of Estonia? How might “not staying silent” look in different times and cultures, including today?
5. Throughout this series, we have experienced stories where music was central in revolution, singing was weapon, a chorus was liberating, song was the glue that connected people. How did music do this? And how could song help us, even now?

### **Individual Reflections:**

Please take a couple minutes to reflect and journal.

Fill in the blanks with words that the Estonians who sang under Soviet occupation might use complete this statement (and how would you?):

“I believe \_\_\_\_\_, even when \_\_\_\_\_.”

### **Share Reflections:**

Invite participants to share their “I Believe” sentences if they would like to do so. Only share the sentences so that this is a simple sharing, not a discussion.

### **Closing Prayer:**

Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we have caught throughout this season of Advent and Christmas of your gifts of hope, love, joy, and peace. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of struggle— even when we have not been sure of tomorrow, you have ignited the Light within us, and we have glowed with its brilliance from the inside out.