



Holding faith: Six commitments to cultivate hope

When the future becomes harder to face, how do some people still hold faith with hope, conscious though they are of violence and injustice?

I've been sitting down with people who work with hope in the face of difficulty. Among them are people with experience of being a refugee, homeless, or bereaved; people who work to support others, such as community workers and therapists; and people working for social change. All the people who've spoken to me have six commitments in common, which sustain their hopeful way of being.

1. Keeping alive

'We too are being confronted by our conflicted loyalties. Our task remains... to stay awake.' Ched Myers, theologian and activist

- The lives of others can seem far away, the life of the earth further still. Are we awake – are we *alive* – to the life around us, even to the life within us?
- More than mere spectators who look out on the world without care or concern, can we be witnesses who draw nearer to the life around us, knowing it makes a claim on how we might live?
- Ask: What do I need to keep alive to the life of the world? What do we all need?

2. Feeling promise

'There are individuals... holding the humane tissue alive in areas of ultimate barbarity... and they're able to sustain it because there is in them some kind of sense of beauty that knows the horizon that we're really called to...'

John O'Donohue, poet

- Even as doom looms in our talk, the life in and around us bends towards flourishing.
- How often do we notice the world as a place of vitality and generosity, turned towards wellness?
- Ask: How can I receive the promise of the living world more openly? What do we need to take it into ourselves more fully?

3. Facing tragedy

'Hope... you have to face the tragedy of the world.' Basma Bodabos, student and refugee

- It's hard to face up to the affliction around us, and within us. How ready are we to reckon with 'the tragedy of the world' and the forces that make it that way?
- What part have we been playing in the violence, be it physical, emotional, economic, cultural, ecological, or any other kind?
- Ask: How can I find the courage to face the world? What do we need to cultivate it?

4. Reading power

'The world is always being made and is never finished.' Rebecca Solnit, writer and activist

- The system we live in can seem fixed like a brick wall. But a closer look — or a longer view — shows it shifting all the time, more like a teeming forest, where the acts of everyone count in the life of the whole.
- In hope's work, can we hold onto 'the truth of the brick wall' and 'the truth of the forest' at the same time?
- Ask: What do I need to appreciate the ecology of power at work in the world?

5. Committing now

'Even in a broken world, things aren't fully broken.' Hannah, community worker

- In a time of losses, optimism gives up and hope doubles down.
- When tomorrow is hard to face, can we still feel and know that life matters today, and find joy there?
- Ask: What do I need to hold faith with what I care about? Can we commit to life in the present, whatever the future may bring?

6. Walking together

'Salvation is always social.' Monica Coleman, theologian

- When the path ahead seems unsure, without a clear way through, can we gain courage from holding our hope in common, accompanying one another in the walk and the work?
- Ask: What do I need to hold my own share of hope's work while trusting others with theirs?

Find a growing collection of resources for conscious hope at hopeswork.org.

David Gee.

Artwork: Victory Palms (detail) by Emily Johns