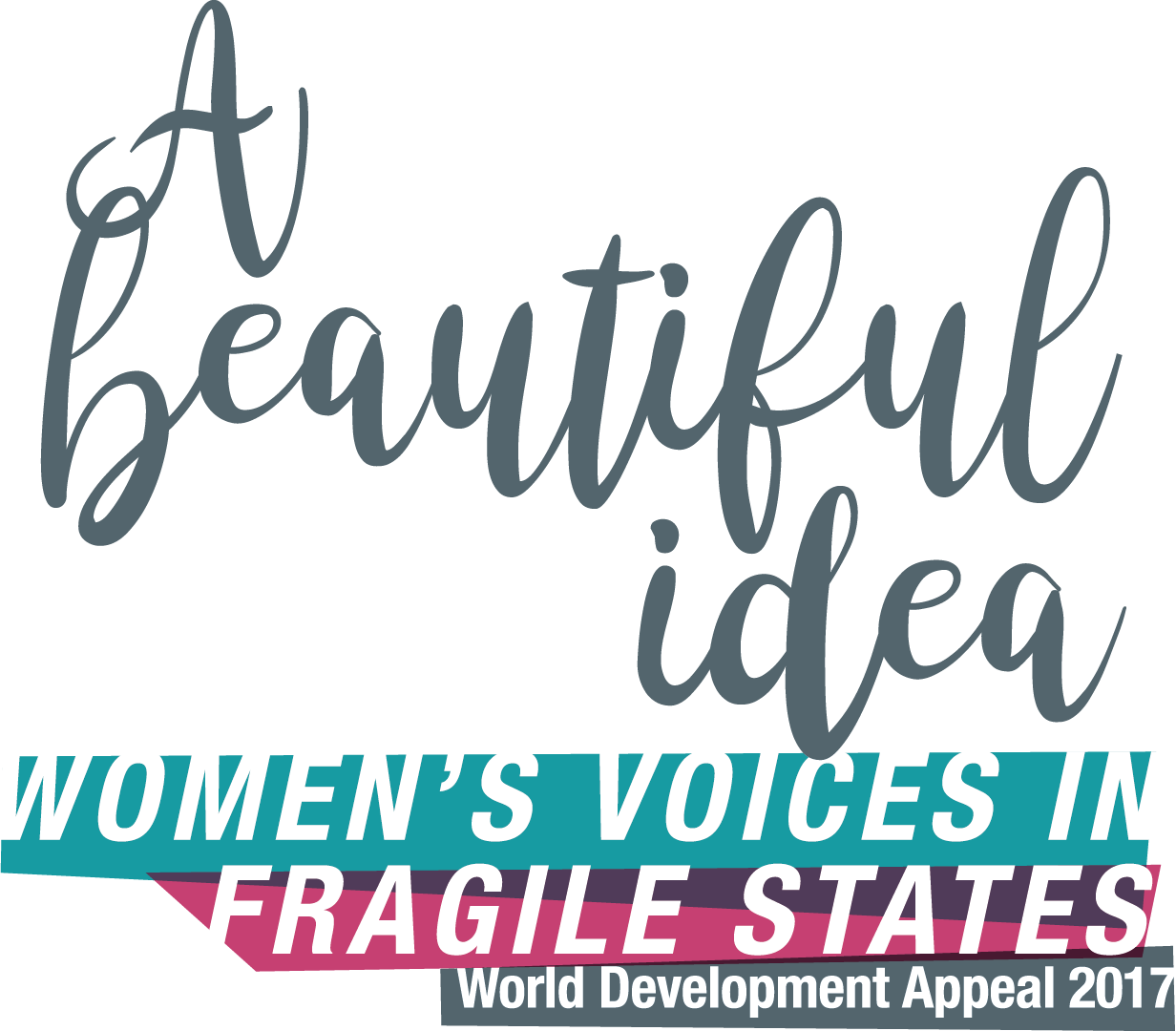
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# Hope’s story | Worship materials

This year’s theme on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is an intensely moving one, harrowing and yet, ultimately inspiring. Its focus on the story of Hope is couched in terms of personal testimony, a narrative of courage, resilience and faith in the face of almost unspeakable brutality. Her experience could be described in a phrase coined by the theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr, “Participation in the Present Passion”.

The Passion of Jesus in Holy Week, recorded in the gospels and reflected upon further by the apostles in the epistles speaks of the uniqueness of his redemptive death on the cross. The church understands his passion in two ways. First, as his suffering with, for and in place of a suffering and sinful humanity where the root meaning of the Latin word “passio” meaning “suffer” is self-evident. And second, his desire to serve and fulfil the purpose of the God who sent him in mutual love to bring reconciliation and redemption was the central passion or core devotion of his life and ministry.

Jesus’ sacrifice notwithstanding, there’s also another theme in which the apostle daringly claims that his sufferings, and, by implication, that of others too, completes Christ’s afflictions (Colossians 1:24). Indeed, we can say that when anyone suffers for their faithful witness to the gospel, they are participating in the present passion of Christ himself and can overcome the worst that life might bring (Romans 8:18-39). In the case of Hope, in the distressing circumstances which she endured in the DRC, we stand in awe at how the love of God, revealed in the grace of Christ, was somehow demonstrated in her courageous faith and resilient hope.

Whatever else we humans are, we are vulnerable; impinged upon by both good and bad, things that harm us, as well as things that bring healing. In this ambiguity we are affected by some dynamics that afflict us and others that affirm and edify us. In our unbelief, we often try to deny or suppress our vulnerability - a futile strategy. However by trust in God’s steadfast love, faith in Christ’s grace, we can respond otherwise so that, mysteriously and wonderfully, our vulnerability is the occasion or means by which the glory of God in Christ becomes luminous and radiant. Paul’s image of clay jars conveys the truth that the spiritual treasure of the new creation can be borne and shared by people of tenacious faith, akin to plain, earthen vessels serving a greater purpose. In a phrase that frames the message of 2 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul says that “we do not lose heart” (verses 1 and 16). By the power of the Spirit, the grace of Christ shines forth in and through the fragile yet resilient vulnerability of faithful people to the glory of God at work even here. Beyond what we might think possible, in defiant resistance to the many facets of evil we may face, marvel at the way in which Hope survived her ordeal. And then, having heard her story, and listened to the joyous way in which she sings her faith on the DVD provided, let your generosity for this year’s World Development Appeal reflect something of your wonder at how Christ’s grace in such vulnerability can serve God’s greater glory.

## Suggested Scripture Readings:

Psalm 42

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Matthew 25:31-46

2 Corinthians 4

Romans 8:18-39

## Suggested Hymns/Praise (The Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook):

367 We cannot measure how You heal

596 Make me a channel of Your peace

602 When I needed a neighbour

628 Beauty for brokenness

## Prayer:

Living God, we learn from scripture that you are Lord of all, a God of holy love, and that those who belong to you are called to live in a fitting manner, ways befitting the children of God. For the embodiment of your love in Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, we worship and thank you. For the presence of the Holy Spirit, shaping our lives in ways we scarce thought possible, we express our gratitude. For the mysterious work of your overarching providence, blessing us beyond what any of us have deserved, we bless you in return.

And yet, how much we still don’t fathom, for as we consider our own lives, or ponder the ways of this complex world, we can’t help wondering why things are as they seem to be. Why, we ask, do nature’s forces turn so savagely, causing such havoc to innocent people caught in their path? Why is it that the poor, who already have so little, are further impoverished by the unfair markets of global trade? Why can’t we feed the hungry millions when enough is produced to share around? Why is it that illness causes such misery, or circumstances rob us of a happy future? Why such vicious inhumanity, the bloodshed on our streets, the horrors of war, the poison or pettiness that trips from our tongues?

Lord, to whom else can we go, for you have the words of eternal life, words that address the enormity of evil, timely words for the stresses and strains of everyday life? By your Spirit, prompt us to listen more carefully and discern more prayerfully, your ways conveyed in the scriptures that healing balm and wise counsel will calm our souls and steady our nerve. We pray for those whose context is very different from our own, those whose story is too strange or sad for us to fully appreciate. May Christ’s passion nurture our compassion that those on the hard margins or precarious places of your beloved but beleaguered world may receive the resources they so sorely need [silent intercessions]. So let our creed become as tangible as a generous gift, a sacrificial offering, prayers transformed into loving deeds. Amen.