

# LOVE PERIOD.

WITH REV. DR.  
JACQUI LEWIS

Transformed by Hope  
With Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis

Jacqui Lewis: Hey, love. I'm Jacqui Lewis and this is Love Period. We've not made new episodes in a little bit. In this season my producers have been busy, I've been busy building a building and trying to be a public theologian in the spaces that have drawn all of us into deep reflection and sometimes worry to be honest. But we're coming back. We've got a new season coming and we're so excited about it. In the meantime, these reflections, these short monologues are personal to me and I hope will be helpful to you. What do we mean by love period? What do we mean by love in the space of our personal relationships and our life of work play and as citizens on the planet? What's love got to do with that? I've been thinking really hard about it, frankly, writing a little bit about it and I'm sharing these pieces with you, hoping that there's something in it for you. I hope these reflections, these monologues can help you think about loving yourself and your neighbor more robustly, more kindly, more generously, more fully, more authentically. I'm working on that and maybe you are too.

So here we go. Hi, friends. As I'm recording this monologue, we are in the season of Advent. This is a Christian concept of four weeks of reflecting before Christmas. Of course, it's tied like all of our spiritualities are to the winter solstice and so the lengthening of days, the coming of light, and this arc of Advent reflection moves from darkness to light. Often the prophets, the Hebrew scripture prophets are used in this time of reflection to think about how what's broken gets healed, how dry places become oases, and how darkness, and I mean darkness in that ancient sense of darkness maybe being filled with something ominous or something unseemly or something scary. Not darkness like me, like dark, beautiful, loamy soil. Not that, but that ancient sense of darkness being heavy with the weight of our problems. So a cycle of moving from dark to light, from less sun to more sun.

And in that space, the first week is about hope. The second one is about peace. The third is about love, and the fourth is about joy. And those of you who have seen these Advent wreaths, you know that there are purple candles for hope and peace. There's a pink candle for love, which I have to say I love that that candle is pink. And then the final one again is purple for joy. And then on Christmas Eve, the Christ candle, a big white candle is often lit to remind us that in our context as Christians, that Jesus is the light of the world or the light of humankind that has come into the world and the darkness, again, that sense of darkness from ancient culture, the darkness cannot overcome the light. The shadows cannot overcome the light, which is to say evil can't overcome good, which is to say brokenness will end eschatologically in healing.

So I love this opportunity to reflect. I'm assigned myself a preaching series which one can do when one is the senior minister at Middle Church to take the four weeks and help us to reflect together on what this time means, what this moment in time means around those four issues. And I got to say, I've gotten so many questions about hope, so many questions about hope in my social pages and from my congregants. How do you hope in these times, and I'm not presuming anything, friends, about how you voted for in the election. What did you do, what levers you pulled, I don't presume to know what your politics are, but I'll say in my particular community of faith, which is very multi all the things, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, many gendered, lots of sexual expressions, lots of flavors of Christianity, and also inner faith, more and more, Muslims and Jews and Buddhists, even the agnostics and the atheists who come to church because they love the music.

That's my community and my community is pretty broken up about what's going to happen

to immigrants and what's going to happen to trans people and what's going to happen to queer people and what's going to happen to women or pregnant people and what's going to happen to the environment, what's going to happen to us, school systems? What's going to happen with... We are grieving honestly at Middle Church, and I want you to keep listening because again, no matter which lever you pulled, no matter who you voted for up and down the tickets, you and I know that America is in a wholly hot mess time, and I mean wholly as in W-H-O-L-L-Y, wholly hot mess time of just strident disagreement and incivility in the public square and lots of us versus them, lots of fear of the other, the so-called other. So how do we hope in times of devastation and destruction? How do we hope in times of disappointment and a drought kind of a feeling of dryness in our souls, how do we hope?

So the sermon I preached last week as I record this, my first sermon on hope, I'm thinking that our show producers will drop that link into the show notes, but I focused on this passage from Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 33:14-16, and I'm not going to read them. I'm going to paraphrase that this is an oracle from Jeremiah to people who are in exile defeated by the Chaldeans, North Kingdom and South Kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem. Excuse me, Judah and Israel. And they're like, it's a hot dry time. I mean the streets are instead of filled with laughing, dancing, joyful people, the streets are filled with rubble and honestly broken bodies and broken hopes, broken dreams. There used to be livestock and animals and now there's arid dry places. No sign of life, no proof of life is what Jeremiah writes. And promises that there is a time coming soon where once again the sound of joy, the sound of laughter, the sound of dancing, the sound of music, the sound of bridegrooms and brides celebrating. Once again, soon that's coming.

And ancient theologies were like, God did this. God did this to us because we were bad. And this particular Christian pastor does not believe in theologies of God doing this because we were bad. I think the God who created us, I think the God who loves us gave us free will and most of the hot messes that we encounter are things we've done. We the people, we all the people, the communities we've used up our resources, we've put holes in the atmosphere, we've put holes in the earth, we've hoarded instead of sharing our resources with one another, we've caused enmity amongst ourselves. We looked at skin tone and sexuality and gender and as deciders of who's worthy and valuable.

We've made such a chasm in our economy that some people just don't have anything to eat while the trillionaire class owns so much. We did that. God didn't do that. God didn't send Sandy or Katrina or Maria. Now to punish us, storms happen, fires happen, but we set the conditions for fiercer fires and fiercer storms. We humans decided that race mattered. We humans decided that some of us are worthier, some of us are not. And quite honestly, as I say it it breaks my soul because we didn't have to do that. So Jeremiah's Oracle of soon coming better times. Despite how we got there, speaks to me right now. The pictures in that text, if you look up Jeremiah 33, they will remind you of the scenes you've seen in your feed from Haiti or Congo or Ukraine or yes, Gaza.

They will remind you of the scenes you've seen in times of war and also times of peace, so-called peace, when some kids are just finding their food on garbage dumps. Into that space this text comes and says, "Unless and until day doesn't follow night, unless and until night doesn't follow day." In other words, unless and until I who am God, I who am God and order the cosmos is unable to make day come and unable to make night come, unless and

until that then I've got you people. I've got you people, and I'm a promise keeping God. I need that. I need that right now. I need that right now. Hope for me is an expectation, maybe an earnest, strident, enthusiastic expectation that what we believe can happen, what we want to happen, can happen. That's lots of different dictionary definitions all smashed together about hope as a verb, hope as an action, a decision to lean into what we believe can happen with enthusiasm.

And one of my favorite rabbis, Daniel Hartman of the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem says that a life of faith is learning how to see. You all are. If you're in the CAC world, you know that there's a podcast called Learning How to See by McLaren hosts. Daniel Hartman says, "A life of faith, a life of ethics, an ethical life is learning how to see." And I'm saying hope is about eyesight. Hope is about the ability to see what God is doing in the world and trust in it, believe in it. Hope is about eyesight. About three years ago, maybe four, I had two cataracts removed and my doctor said, "You're too young for cataracts." So I must have had a spike in blood sugar at some point, and I'm sure I did, but two thick cataracts removed. And what do you want?

You get a choice about what happens when your cataracts come off. And so I asked for a far seeing eye lens and an up close eye lens. I have bionic eyes, you all. I got one eye that can see far and one eye that sees close. And sometimes when I'm in a car or helping my husband map out things, I have to cover one of my eyes so I can see further with the far eye. Hope is being able to see further out from today's moment. Cover your eye and see further out, see the moral arc of the universe bending towards us. See, as far as the eye can see, as far as you can look, way out there is the promise of God. Way out there is God's fidelity. Not mine, not yours, not my faithfulness, not yours, God's faithfulness and promise keeping, way out there, bending the moral arc of the universe toward justice, making crooked places straight, making dry places an oasis, making broken places whole, making enmity among people, peace and love and joy. Way out there is God, period.

Hope is about being able to see that. And hope is also, I think friends about turning around behind us and looking back over our shoulder like a Sankofa, turning around and seeing what has happened and noticing, noticing back there. Is God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Mary and Leah and Rachel, and God did deliver Daniel from the lion's den and God did lead the people out of bondage and across a waterway on dry land to get them to the next place. And God did keep faithfulness even though Moses didn't get to go there, they did. And God is the God of emancipation here in America and the God of voting rights and the God of suffrage and the God of human rights for trans and queer people and marriage equality and voting rights. God is this God. If you look over our shoulders, we see God partnering with our ancestors to make a way out of no way. Hope is the ability to see, to see God's hand and God's faithfulness and God's love at work.

I think hope is about eyesight, keeping our eyes on the holy one who is at work in us and in the world. So when I've been thinking about hope, I've been looking up other people's thoughts and I'm going to share three really quickly and tell you where they're at so you can find them too. Emily Dickinson says, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never

stops at all.” Ooh, isn’t that gorgeous? I’m going to read that again. “Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all.” The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness, crack of light.”

And Howard Thurman, one of my favorite mystics, pastor of one of the first multi racial churches in the country said, “In the stillness of quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair. In the stillness of quiet if we listen, we can hear the whisper of the heart giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, hope to despair.” Hope doesn’t come because we pretend that we’re not despairing. Hope is a verb. Hope is in God, hope is sometimes elusive, but waiting for us to see. My friends we’re almost at the year-end and the days are going to start getting longer and we will see more clearly, more clearly, more clearly. Close one eye and see how far you can see. That’s hope.

Now turn around behind you. Take a look back there. See God making a way out of no way. See God changing the world with our help. That’s hope. I hope you and yours have as beautiful a time as you can in this year-end time, that you make time for loving acts, for kindness, that you’re gentle with yourself, that you’re gentle with your closest neighbors, meaning the ones you share household with, and you find new and surprising meaning in these ancient stories of God coming all the way down to be with us, to teach us how to love, to give us hope. I’ll see you on the other side. We’ve got a new season of Love Period being cooked by my producers at CAC, and we are going to have a great time putting those in the world for you. In the meantime, happy all the things that you celebrate and a blessed new year to you.

Thank you for listening to these reflections this fall as we’ve explored what it means to listen, learn and lean into peace. We’re working on a new season of Love Period and we invite your thoughts as to what you’d like to see and hear in the next season. You can drop an email to Dorothy and Corey, my producers at [podcasts@cac.org](mailto:podcasts@cac.org). That’s [podcasts@cac.org](mailto:podcasts@cac.org). We’d love to hear from you and can’t wait to share a brand new season of Love Period with you in 2025.