

## Finding Your Breath: Listening To Our Bodies

February 25, 2017 ~ Second Sunday in Lent

Rev. Rebekah Sweet

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**Romans 8:26-30, 38-39** (NRSV) - Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **INTRODUCTION TO BREATHING**

The early church believed that breath and Spirit were one in the same. At the Creation of humans, God's breath blew and there was life in the human being.

Ezekiel saw the vision of God breathing across the valley of dry bones to restore life. The resurrected Christ greeted the hiding disciples with peace, and then breathed and the Holy Spirit filled them. At Pentecost there was breath like a mighty wind and the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered.

When we embrace our bodies as the holy vessels of God, we realize that God desires for the Spirit/Breath to abide with us and give us LIFE. Breathe....Listen....

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### **Take a deep breath!**

**Exhale the negativity, worry, brooding that you need to let go of.**

**Inhale the life-giving breath of our Creator.**

"George, how is it going?" Will Willimon asked upon entering the hospital room. Will knew that his friend had, only yesterday, received a diagnosis of cancer with a prognosis for a very short life.

"Preacher, I am glad you are here. I need some help."

"What kind of help?"

"I can't figure out what to pray for," George confessed. "I mean, do I pray for healing? Surely God knows that I want to be healed. But why should I be healed, and not

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everybody else in this hospital? What makes me so special? A lot of people my age get cancer. Why should I think that my cancer is any different from theirs and why should God give me some special dispensation?

“On the other hand,” he continued, “I really do want to be healed. If I am healed, think of all the good things I could do. I could continue the work that I’m doing in the church, the work for others. But maybe I’m just being self-deceptive. Just like a frightened kid, who’ll promise God anything.

“And who am I now to be coming to God asking for all of this? I have a lousy prayer life, don’t give God the time of day on most days. So here I’ve come like a blathering idiot, begging, wheeling and dealing, who am I to be making such prayers?”<sup>i</sup>

George’s mind was spinning. While he had plenty of words, his ability to reason at that moment of crisis failed to bring him to the feet of Jesus in prayer and supplication. He knew that his speech had been a blowing out of all that was confounding him in life and faith, and he had not yet found a way to receive the fresh air of God’s presence, journeying with him (and everyone else in that hospital) as they met the challenges of each new day.

### **Take a deep breath!**

**Exhale the negativity, worry, brooding that you need to let go of.**

**Inhale the life-giving breath of our Creator.**

Hear again Paul’s reality check and reassurance: *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

Have you ever had a situation where you wanted to pray, but just couldn’t figure out what to say? Maybe you have had conflicting feelings, and don’t really know what you want. You watch the evening news, especially this past week following the shooting at the high school in Parkland, Florida and the shootings here in this area, the pleas for help and the recommendations of law makers, and you **SIGH**. You may want to pray for that promotion for yourself or a loved one, that will cause a move across the country, necessitating leaving family behind, and you **SIGH**. Or you pray for someone to find a way out of a difficult situation, but you also sense that they aren’t really going to “get it” until they learn lessons the hard way, and you **SIGH**.

Perhaps you have been in a situation where you are holding your breath, waiting to hear that baby’s borning cry, until you can **SIGH**. Or, you may have sat at the bedside of a loved one who has turned ashen gray, struggling for each shallow breath, until the eventual silence makes you **SIGH**. Maybe you are relieved, frustrated, confused, weary, angry, or tired of uttering prayers that just seem to bounce off the walls, and you **SIGH**.

***When my spirit is SIGHING with the weight of life’s problems, decisions, mysteries, and challenges, I cling to the assurance that the Spirit is interceding***

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*with SIGHS too deep for my words – something that is beyond language -- and impresses on God just what I'm really going through inside.*

### Take a deep breath!

Exhale the negativity, worry, brooding that you need to let go of.

Inhale the life-giving breath of our Creator.

Sometimes words get in the way! Sometimes we get so concerned with saying the right words, using eloquent syntax, making sure our American English Grammar and flowery descriptions are on target for the situation, so much so that we fail to connect our spirits with the source of the breath of life! Sometimes we focus so clearly on the structure of our prayers, making sure they include divine ascription, thanksgiving, confession, and intercession, that we lack the awareness of listening to the care and guidance that our Almighty God would offer to us.

I suggest that during this season of Lent, we all begin the spiritual discipline of a breathing, sighing prayer more than once each day. Focusing on letting go of **our** heavy burdens, and opening our hearts to God is likely to bring the centering peace of mind and spirit that faith that our Savior affords to us, but we seldom grasp.

Maybe you've never prayed this way. Let's try it together.

**Close your eyes;** and **begin to breathe deeply** as is comfortable for you. ...

**Open your hands** as a sign of readiness to receive God's amazing love and care for you; ... let them be open as a sign of receptivity to the possibilities the divine Spirit may offer you. Breathe deeply.

**Bring into focus a situation** where you need God. Maybe it's a relationship, a personal struggle; it may be a health concern, or a behavior or attitude you can't get under control. Perhaps you cannot even define the problem. ... Don't worry about coming up with a solution or prescription for change. Instead, let go of trying to control everything, and just offer a **SIGH** from your heart. Breathe deeply.

**Give it all over to Jesus**, the one who lived, and died, and rose for us. **Give it all to Jesus**, and receive the breath of blessing our God sends to you. **SIGH.** Breathe deeply

(CHIME)

For some, that may be the most honest and faithful prayer ever prayed. Our SIGHS are prayers. Our prayers are so much more than words. Perhaps we can reshape our daily lives with that attitude of openness and trust in our Savior which allows us to "pray without ceasing," as we tune in to God with our breath!

Joyce Rupp wrote,

*When we are experiencing the groaning within us—*

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*those webs of confusion or disorientation or loss—  
when our life appears to be filled with failure and un-gained dreams,  
when darkness looms up large against the tiny light of our hope,  
when our inner poverty gasps for a touch of fullness,  
when our brokenness cries out to be mended,  
it is then that our groaning is met with the Spirit of God  
who groans within us.*

*It is this God of life who blesses our inner birthing, standing by us, urging us to stay in  
the process, filling us with energy by the intimate touch  
of an eternal love shared with us. <sup>ii</sup>*

So, I invite you to begin the Spiritual Discipline of daily breathing, sighing prayers, that we might all receive again the assurance:

"that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

SIGH ... Breathe deeply

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<sup>i</sup> Pulpit Resource, Vol. 32, Year C, April-June, 2004, p. 42.

<sup>ii</sup> *Praying Our Goodbyes*, p. 68