

May the words in my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O God.

Over the last couple of months, I've been meeting with someone to do breath work, which basically means that for about an hour I focus on taking deep breaths, using different breathing techniques. For instance, I will breathe into my belly and then my lungs and then my chest until my whole body is full of oxygen, the breath that sustains my life, where I practice taking a long, slow inhale and then just letting it go, so that my breath falls out of me, and I get to practice both receiving the breath that gives me life, and releasing the breath that isn't mine to own or control. Or my favorite, where I take the biggest breath I can, and I hold it for as long as I can, and while I'm holding it, I lean back so that my breath is filling my body and I am an observer.

For some moments, I get to feel what it is like to let my breath hold me, experiencing it as something that is both separate and a part of me, both quietly present and powerfully working on my behalf. It may sound a little funny to spend money and time on something that we all naturally do. Everyone in this room is breathing without having to be told to, but the interesting thing is that most of the time we aren't breathing at our full capacity. We often treat our bodies like machines and let them run at half empty or less. And if you pay attention to your breathing on any given day, you may notice that when you are stressed or anxious or afraid, you may begin taking shallow breaths and maybe even holding your breath, instead of taking deeper breaths that will regulate your nervous system and bring you peace. We have to be mindful to draw on this source of life that is inside of us.

Most spiritual traditions recognize the breath as being holy, the life force that energizes us or the vehicle of God's spirit. And in Christianity we talk about the breath of God and the Holy Spirit breathing in us as an indwelling member of the Trinity. And in our creation narratives, a wind from God swept over the face of the waters, and then God's words created out of nothing. The psalmist describes this as all the hosts of heaven being made by the breath of God's mouth. And when God formed the first person from the dust of the ground, God breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, making humans not just

physical forms, but beings that are living and animated by divinity.

And in our gospel narratives, Jesus tells his disciples that after he dies, he will send them the spirit of truth, who will continue to advocate for them, counsel them, and teach them about who God is. And Jesus fulfills this promise after his resurrection when he appears to the disciples, shows them the wounds in his hands and feet, and then breathes on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." After all the traumas they have been through, they have been reunified to the breath of God, reconciling them to God and to one another. Like the first human they have been reanimated with life.

And on Pentecost Sunday, which we are celebrating today, Jesus's followers are all gathered together, after Jesus's ascension into heaven, and suddenly a rushing of forceful wind fills the entire house, and tongues like fire fall on each one of them, and they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and people begin speaking in languages they have never heard and prophesying about who God is. The Apostle Paul later says that "This is the same Holy Spirit that prays in us," interceding with sighs too deep for words, making us of one mind and of one heart with God.

I wonder how you experience the Holy Spirit in your life. And there are many ways to answer this question. Perhaps like Jesus's followers on Pentecost, you have had a wild and powerful experience of God's spirit where it filled you like a rushing wind and your life was instantly changed. Or you may be a Christian who has never experienced this kind of energy and don't really know what your connection to the spirit is, or if you even have one. Or you may have experienced God's spirit earlier in your life, but today you just can't access it, and wonder where it went. Or maybe the spirit has been a steady indwelling presence that you know through the peace and counsel you regularly receive from it. Or maybe like me, you're experiencing God's spirit through the very tangible act of breathing. Whatever your answer, God's spirit is in you as close to you as your breath. And God wants to breathe new life into you.

One of my favorite passages in Scripture is our reading this morning from the Prophet Ezekiel. I was spending a summer in Jerusalem during seminary and

was going through a difficult time of depression, when I felt disconnected from my life source and was desperately seeking to revitalize my spirit. And throughout the summer, I went on day trips through the dry and arid desert of the holy land, and I'd never been so hot. And one evening I felt prompted to read my Bible and turn to this passage in Ezekiel. And I felt like I was transported into this valley of dry bones and could hear God saying it to the prophet, "Mortal, can these bones live?", then the noise of rattling and bones coming together, being wrapped in sinews, and covered in flesh and sealed in skin, but this still wasn't enough.

God said, "Prophecy to the breath, Ezekiel. Call on the breath to come from all the four winds to breathe upon those who have died, that they may live", the same winds that swept over the waters at the time of creation and forcefully blew on Jesus's followers at Pentecost, the same breath that breathed all things into being and filled the first human's body with life so that we could be more than physical vessels, the people invigorated by divinity. And so, breath came into those who had been slain in this valley and they lived.

And in reading this, I knew that God was breathing new life into me. While I was walking through my own valley of suffering, I knew that my spirit wouldn't feel dry and lifeless forever, but that it would be brought back to life, maybe not all at once like these dry bones, but in time I would breathe more easily again. And this encounter with scripture set me on a trajectory of receiving from God in a fuller way that continues today as God keeps breathing new life in me. And I'm sure many of you can relate to this, we all have experiences of suffering and traumas that we go through our lives. One in four people in the US suffer from diagnosable mental health issues and one in 10 suffer from depression. And this can make us feel cut off from our source of life. But even then, especially then, with every inhale and exhale, God is breathing new life in you.

And while sometimes this is powerful and exciting, mostly it is just the moment-to-moment practice of letting God's spirit breathe more deeply and freely in you. The practice of leaning back so that God's breath can fill you and you can observe this all-loving, life-giving presence that is making you more than

disjointed dry bones, but a divine being animated with God's holy breath of life.

So, I invite you to join me in learning how to breathe as a way of cultivating your relationship with the Holy Spirit and a way of receiving fullness of life as your breath reconciles you to the life force that is in you.

And here are some practical ways to do this. Try taking breaths during the day to enjoy the breath that God has given you. You may want to go outside and look at the ocean or go in your backyard or lie down and rest. Become aware of your breath in stressful situations, or when you're feeling anxious, and take this as a cue or a reminder to focus on breathing more deeply. Pair your breath with movement, like when you're walking or doing yoga or stretching. Notice what breath feels like somatically. Make an activity you do often a time to breathe more intentionally, like while you're driving or completing work tasks. Or try a breath prayer, on your inhale and exhale say a short phrase. For instance, on your inhale, pray, "be still and know" and on your exhale "that I am God".

And as always, our practices are just ways to become more present, to receive from God, who is already and always there. So, on this Pentecost and every moment going forward, may the wind of God's spirit animate and energize you. May the breath of God fill and sustain you. May the Holy Spirit breathe in you all counsel, comfort and peace, and may every part of your bones, sinews, flesh and skin, heart, mind, body and spirit, be reconciled to God through the breath that is in you and brought back into the fullness of life. And may you enjoy the breath that God has given you. Amen.