

Breathing In and Out
Sunday, January 7, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

Listen first, then sing.

Breathing in
what I need
to be free

*Breathing in
what I need
to be free*

Breathing in
What I now
Can let go

*Breathing out
what I now
can let go*

Together now...

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

One more time

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in

Breathe out

Breathe in
Breathe out

+

Friday night I went to Shabbat services at a wonderful community called Nefesh, which worships at our diocesan center, St. Paul's Commons.

Their rabbi, Susan Goldberg, had invited several of us who are interfaith partners to be with them in solidarity as there have been an increase of antisemitic incidents in the area and across the country. As Rabbi Susan put it "it is a time in the broader community where voices of fear are being amplified and directed towards security measures that do not align with what we know is true safety. We know that safety comes in solidarity."

About halfway through the service there was a time of prayer, and the congregation sang this song we just sang together. And it was really something. I'm not sure I can describe the experience.

It was an act of joy.

It was an act of release.

It was an act of sacred resistance and claiming of power. That we will neither turn away from the terrible things happening in the world and even in our lives but we will not let them define us, we will not let them stop us from loving in return.

It brought tears to my eyes.

Breath prayer has been a part of my life for a long time ... since my mother used to take me with her to her Self-Realization Fellowship Tuesday night meditation group.

I have a practice that some of you have experienced of beginning meetings in my office with two minutes of silence.

During the first minute I consciously let go of whatever it is I was doing before that meeting, give whatever it is to God, knowing that it will certainly be waiting for me when the meeting is done.

During the second minute I focus on whomever is in the meeting, remember that God has loved them since the moment of their birth and that I am in the presence of the sacred that is them and asking God to love them through me.

And recently I've been reading a book called The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness and Healing in a Toxic Culture and I started to adopt a mindfulness practice that the author suggests and I have to say it has been a game-changer.

Recognizing that the news has become increasingly anxiety-provoking ... even after a pandemic when we thought it couldn't get worse ... and recognize that many if not most of us get our news scrolling on our phones, he recommends two things.

First ... identify a couple times a day when you will scroll for news and only do it then.

And second ... and this is the key ... "adopt a strict mindfulness regimen: five minutes of deep breathing before and after scrolling, no exceptions."

As I have started this, I notice myself being more reflective and less reactive with what is happening around me. I notice that I am able to feel my feelings, befriend them, learn from them ... and then choose what I want to hold onto. What is going to be helpful in me responding faithfully and lovingly to the world around me.

The simple act of breathing in and out ... which is so central to our being that we do it without thinking ... can be transformative.

One more time.

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

One more time

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

+

And love is not the easy thing

The only baggage you can bring

Is all that you can't leave behind.

That's the beginning of a U2 song called Walk On, and Bono is singing about perseverance in love being this process of sorting ... of discerning what to hold on to and what to release.

And love is not the easy thing

The only baggage you can bring

Is all that you can't leave behind.

Breathing in what we need to be free
Breathing out what we now can let go.

It's Epiphany and for the magi, the three sages from the East, it's the end of a long journey to find the Christ Child. And I've been thinking about the baggage they brought ... all that they couldn't leave behind.

Epiphany is a revelation of wisdom. Of what to hold onto ... and what to release. Of how to travel light, carrying only what we need to be free and releasing now what we now can let go.

Breathing in and out.

Now, Gospel tells us they brought three gifts ... gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Love is not the easy thing. The only baggage you can bring is all that you can't leave behind.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh. That's what the magi couldn't leave behind. For Jesus, and for us. Because each one of these gifts holds a question ... of what to hold onto and what to release.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

A precious metal.

An incense for worship

An oil for anointing the dead.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh

What is valuable?

What is sacred?

What can we release to die a holy death?

As we begin this year ... as individuals, as a church, as a nation and as the world ... maybe it's time to do some of that deep breathing and sit with the questions the gifts of the magi offer us.

So let's take a few minutes and do just that. Breathing in and out.

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Gold.

What is valuable?

We have a lot of stuff. We have money. We have possessions.

As George Carlin said “everyone’s got their own pile of stuff ... and when you leave your stuff, you’ve got to lock it up. Wouldn’t want somebody to come by and take any of your stuff. Because what’s a house? A place for your stuff!”

We have a lot of stuff. And we spend a lot of time worrying about our stuff. Protecting it. Getting more of it.

But is it making us free or is our relationship with wealth trapping us. Is our wealth making us free? Or is our wealth and our relationship taking our time, attention, our lives away from things that are more valuable?

To what degree is our wealth helping us live our values of radical inclusion, courageous justice, joyful spirituality and ethical stewardship and to what degree is our wealth and quest for it luring us away from those values.

I can’t answer that question for you. Only I can answer that question for me and only you can answer that question for you. And ... we can wrestle with it together.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

What is truly valuable in our lives?

What are we holding onto and what can we let go of.

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Frankincense.

What is sacred?

I carry a little bottle of Thistle Farms healing oil wherever I go. I use it to anoint people when we pray together.

Everything that happens to us. Everything that happens in the world around us. We carry it in our bodies. We are full of judgment about our bodies – our own and others. When our bodies get sick it can feel like they have turned against us.

And scripture reminds us that our bodies are wonderfully made. Our bodies are to be rejoiced in and with.

The oil ... the beautiful fragrance .. is a way of remembering that our bodies are sacred. That the bodies we encounter in each other are sacred. That our time together ... time that goes by so, so fast ... is sacred.

How are we spending our time?

What in our life reminds us that our bodies, that we, are sacred?

What relationships help us to be free?

What relationships keep us from seeing ourselves and each other as sacred?

What relationships can we now let go.

I can't answer that question for you. Only I can answer that question for me and only you can answer that question for you. And ... we can wrestle with it together.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

What is truly valuable and sacred in our lives?

What are we holding onto and what can we let go of.

Breathing in

*What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Myrrh.

So many of us are in times of great transition.

Many of us are moving into retirement. After a long life of having so much of our identity bound up in our work, we are moving into a time of life where we are being invited to let go of that identity, that control, that sense of purpose that comes from productivity and exercising power in the workplace.

There are other transitions, too.

Getting married or getting divorced
Going off to college or sending kids off to college.
Becoming parents.
Losing parents.
Moving into assisted living communities or other places that just might be the last place we ever live.
Losing a sibling or losing a child.

And the church is changing, too. And that can be so difficult because so many of us have put our heart and soul into this place, and the church and the people who have been in this community have been and are so sacred to us ... and it just feels like in a world that is changing so much if just this one place could just stay the same.

My friend, Scott Barker, is the Episcopal bishop of Nebraska. And he goes and visits churches, particularly in the western part of the state, where it's not just that the church is dying but the town is dying. In 30 years, neither will be there.

And what Scott helps the people recognize, and what Scott has been teaching me, is that helping something die a holy death is an amazing and sacred thing.

When I am with a family gathered around the bedside of someone who is dying, I lead a ritual where each member of the family says whatever they want to say Anything they want to make sure is not left unsaid before their loved one dies ... and then they take that Thistle Farms essential oil – essentially myrrh -- and anoint the dying body. To remember, rejoice, grieve, love. To claim a holy death of one who has been such a huge part of our life. And to release them ... and in many ways us, to God.

With every journey, with every transition in our lives, we have an opportunity to look at what we are carrying.

Love is not the easy thing.
The only baggage you can bring
Is all that you can't leave behind.

What in your life is making you more free.
And what can you now let go?

What in our church life together is making us free?
And what can we give thanks for, celebrate, anoint and now let go?

I can't answer that question for you. Only I can answer that question for me and only you can answer that question for you. And ... we can wrestle with it together.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

Breathing in and out. Breathing in and out.

What is truly valuable and sacred in our lives?

What are we holding onto and what can we let go of?

What has served its purpose and can die a holy death?

These questions ... they are the gift of the magi.

These questions ... they become our epiphanies.

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

*Breathing in
What I need
To be free*

*Breathing out
What I now
Can let go*

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Amen