Second Sunday of Easter, Year A

Breathing is believing

If you tuned into the Gospels of Lent and Holy Week and into Easter, you got an earful of the Gospel of John. And you probably noticed that John is not short on words – long stories, wordy dialogues, extensive prayers.

So I find it interesting that the most important moment in today's Gospel story from John is a breath. It's that moment where Jesus doesn't say anything but just breathes on the people huddled behind the locked door on Easter night. Followed by: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This morning, I want us to pause there and contemplate this breath that completes the first day of Easter in the Gospel of John.

We first encounter this breath in the second chapter of Genesis. This is what the Creator breathes into the dusty form of the first person.

In John's Easter Story the breath of God is back in a divine act that creates, empowers and sends. Only this time, it's a breath of resurrection – Easter night is the story of the raising of the disciples to new life. Filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit, these men and women are not merely followers. They are apostles. They are sent to do the restorative, and forgiving work that the Holy Spirit empowers them to do.

The first Christians are required only to do one thing to live in this new life: believe.

Here's what belief sounds like: (intake of breath). That is how one receives the breath of God.

Belief is not done with the head, it is not an act of the will or the logical mind. This was Thomas' problem – trying to meet the Resurrected Christ -- head on. That's where doubt tends to live. Get over that, Jesus says, and believe. It's as if Jesus is saying to Thomas, Just Breathe. Because seeing does not automatically result in believing. Receiving the Spirit that God breathes into us -- that's an act of believing.

In fact, breathing is believing.

(Intake of breath) My Lord and My God.

But Easter doesn't end with the breath of belief.

In Genesis, the breath of God sets humanity apart to tend and steward creation with God. In Easter, the breath of the risen Christ restores us to that original vocation. I think that's what forgiveness of sin means here in its fullest sense: restoring to right relationship. Along with the transformation of our own human brokenness and alienation, Easter life and Easter breath are about a new life for all of creation. Animated by the Spirit of God, part of our sending out into the world is a tending of that world.

Right now that task can seem overwhelming, given the state of our planet, and its climate, not to mention the state of everything else.

I don't think we can do this work of stewarding a threatened earth without a deep awareness of the power of Easter, and an awareness of the Holy Spirit that entered humanity as a result of Easter. I think that sometimes we can forget what animates us.

At the same time, a gasp of wonder and awe in the midst of our deep sighs at the state of the world can remind us how the holy enters us. We had a chance to experience that with the Artemus II mission – that gasps at views of the moon and earth we have never seen before, the exhale of relief after the crew overcame problems with their heat shield to land safely.

That gasp of Easter wonder and awe is something that we can use more of these days. So for the rest of this sermon, we're going to practice Easter, and the great act of reconnection that the resurrected Christ empowers us to do. We'll do this with the help of a meditation adapted from the work of Joanna Macy.[1]

Relax in your pew, close or unfocus your eyes and start by simply noticing your breath, with no need to change it in any way. Just notice yourself breathing. (Pause)

Bring to your awareness the fact that your breath happens by itself, without any act of will. No decision to inhale or exhale is necessary to do this simple, life-sustaining act. It is almost as if you are being breathed, breathed by life. Spend a few moments now imagining yourself being breathed in this way – the Holy Spirit moving through you in every instance, in a grace-filled act of replenishing each of your cells with oxygen, every moment of your life, whether you are aware of it or not. (pause)

Now consider the people here in church around you. They too are being breathed by life at this same moment. The same is true for your neighbors, your friends, your extended family members. Let the faces of those you love slowly pass across your mind's eye. Wherever they are, whatever they are doing, they too are being breathed by life, by the Spirit that God first breathed into humanity to give us life. (Pause)

Widen that circle now to all people – across our city, our country our world. Let their faces rise before you. All of them are being breathed by life in this present moment. (Pause)

Now extend your circle of care even further to include all of creation. Consider the many kinds of animal and insect life – even microscopic life -- that makes up our eco system. Pets at home. Mammals, winged creatures and birds, crawly things, the life that teams in our waters. These brother and sister beings, too, are being breathed by life today. With them, we are embedded in a diverse web of life that is greater than human understanding. (Pause)

Widen your circle of awareness now to include that living mantle of vegetation that is home to countless creatures across our globe. All the plants, flowers, trees, algae … they too take part in that great

[11] "Breathing Through" exercise in the *Coming Back to Life: An Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* by Joanny Macy and Molly Brown., p 277-278.

exchange of air, acting as the planet's lungs, constantly regenerating the entire atmosphere in the mutual dance of breath that sustains us all .(Pause)

We are connected through time and space with all of creation and our home is within a dynamic, expanding universe. WE are made of stardust, along with everything else in the universe. We humans have evolved the capacity not only to know, but to reflect upon what we know. Through humans, creation has become conscious. (Pause)

Because we can reflect on our knowing, we can make choices and thus change the course of things. WE can use our human voice to speak on behalf of all that is created. Directing our mind to our breath, even for a few moments, exercises that exquisite capacity of attention that comes with the precious gift of being human. (Pause)

When our society would have us clench up in fear, as those first followers of Jesus did in their locked room, the Spirit breathes in and out through each of us, reminding us of our inherent belonging in the family of life, allowing us to reconnect with our Creator at any time, in any place (Pause).

When you are ready, bring your attention back into this holy space, back to the sensations of the breath as it breathes in and out through you and into this mystery of life, remembering that it is always there, whether we are aware or not, to beckon us back to that connection with all of life – with this living planet, with our brother and sister creatures, bound together in God's love within the living canticle of creation.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's People.

Amen.