

## Morning Meditation

Last summer, we were driving down the interstate when a deluge, downpour of rain began. It was what my grandparents in Iowa would have called, “A soaker”. My windshield wipers couldn’t keep up. They barely pushed away the water before another round of rain pellets took their place. I felt a bit like a fish under water, swimming down the road. Everything was blurry and I could barely see in front me. I gripped the steering wheel so tight, my knuckles turned white. It was a rock and hard place moment. Do I try to pull off? But I was concerned about being a sitting duck on the side of the road as other people barreled past. Do I keep going slow and steady? But I was concerned what the cars ahead of me might do. I slowed way down. I choose to keep on keeping on. It was exhausting. My shoulders were sore. My muscles protested and ached. I just wanted it to be over.

That story is a parable for me of the moment we inhabit. I can barely see what is in front of me each day. Long-term planning is talking about next week, forget about next month. The windshield wipers of vision can barely clear away the chaos we encounter every day in the news. I find myself trying to white knuckle life just trying to get through. In a recent grief group, the facilitator talked about “brain-fog” that can happen when someone we love dies. I think collectively as a church, community, and country we are in a brain-fog. We have a collective grief. How many times have you uttered the words, “I can’t believe (fill in the blank with whatever is causing your heart to break; soul to ache; nerves to quake; and mind to quake here).” Or how many times do I start to do one thing and get distracted and then try to go back, only to not be able to remember that initial task? We are driving through a storm of viruses. There is the virus that has caused over 213,000 deaths to raising awareness that racial inequality continues to hurt too many of our brothers and sisters to leadership blaming and shaming each other to personal issues you feel right now.

What are the storms you are navigating right now?

How is it going?

I am reminded of two prayerful mantras. One is, breathe. Our collective breathing is shallow or maybe even holding our breath! Yesterday in the sermon I gave you the “Sigh Prayer.” Where you breathe in and then let out the biggest, belly sigh you can. Then, do it again. And again. Second mantra is just keep taking the next right step, even if you are not completely convinced it is in the right direction. Forward progress does not always mean you are one step closer to the goal...because the goal is simply to be where you are. Life isn’t a football game, life is. That isn’t an incomplete sentence. Life is. Or life is what it is, if the English nerve in you is twitching. I pray today you find a way to breathe and be. To take a step, even if it is ½ a millimeter knowing God takes that step with you.

**Prayer: Breathe on me breath of God, fill me with life anew.**

## Morning Meditation

*Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew; that I may love the way you love and do what you would do.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure, Until with you I will one will, to do and to endure.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God, stir in me one desire; that every earthly part of me may glow with holy fire.*

*Breathe on me, breath of God, so shall I never die, but live with you the perfect (or whole) life of your eternity.*

After yesterday's ending prayer, you knew the above hymn was coming didn't you? Go back and re-read this hymn slowly. Which verse causes your soul to be still? Which words prompts questions? For example, the final verse has the words, "Perfect life" that is like nails on a chalkboard to my soul. So, I substituted in the word, "whole" because that fits for me. In fact, when Jesus in Matthew 5:48 when Jesus says, "Be perfect as God is perfect," the better translation is, "Be whole as God is whole." So much of our life right now feels less than whole. There are holes in our lives right now because we cannot worship together; or go to the theater; or venture out because of the virus. There are holes in our communal life as we are politically polarized and hatred rules too many hearts. There are holes in how we treat each other as less than wholly and holy made in God's image.

When all that start to cause my vision to become as blurry as trying to drive through a deluge of rain, I need to breathe. Breath is the foundation of life. Breath is essential both to sustain our life right now and can guide us toward the One who breathed the breath of life into us in the beginning. Breath is spirit, wind, what stirs our souls and conducts the symphony of our life.

Go back and pray the words of the hymn again slowly. Let them sink in.

Or go to YouTube and listen to a rendition of this to slow you down.

May that breath of God energize and engage your whole self this day.

**Prayer: Let Your holy fire, O God, guide my way and all I do/say today. Amen.**

## **Morning Meditation**

The other morning, I was out for a run, going along, when all the sudden I felt something in my shoe. At first, it was just a light prick on the bottom of my foot. I thought, "Humph, that's slightly annoying. Must be a rock." I tried to shift my foot, which is hard to do in a running shoe. Still, that poke on my foot persistent. I am still jogging along, I think, "Must be on the bottom of my shoe, like an acorn." So, I try to drag my foot across the pavement as I kept my perpetual motion. Still that slight, subtle pain persistent. So, now I am confused. Something isn't right. So, I stop, take off my shoe, and discover I had stepped on a screw that went through the sole of my shoe and was announcing its presence to the bottom of my foot. And because the screw was so tightly lodged in there, I could not pull it out. I needed a screwdriver...which I don't actually carry with my on my morning run. I had to keep on keeping on until I got home.

That is a metaphor/parable of today. Something is off. There are moments/ experiences/ encounters that poke at my consciousness and keep persistently announcing their presence. Some of the things that keep prodding me are the twin viruses of COVID19 and systemic inequalities. I am needled by the needless and hurtful ways we treat each other. There is a tension around us and within us. On Sundays we affirm that we all are beloved created in God's image. Then we throw that out the window during the week because its an election year or because we are on social media and its what everyone does. Sunday morning leaves a lingering challenge to change our lives toward God. It isn't easy. It is like running with a screw in your shoe. By the way, people will think you have a screw loose today if you talk about God's love making an impact. Better to play by the political and cultural rule book than by the unconditional love and unceasing grace of God. There are personal concerns that continue to jab at my mind/heart/soul. There are concerns for the church, the future, my family, and what my call as a pastor will be as the year winds down.

Perhaps it isn't just one screw but many in our shoes that won't go gently into that good night. There are many pains that constantly calling for us to attend. What are those events or experiences that jabs to your soul individually and collectively? How do you search for the source of what sits uneasy within you? How do you respond when that won't easily go away, just as I couldn't yank the screw out of my running shoe? May God's presence continue to enfold and hold you, giving you strength both to breathe as well as take the next right step today in living/embodiment/praying God's grace and love to others.

**Prayer: Let that last sentence, O God, be a living prayer written on my heart and heard in my words today. Amen.**

### **Morning Meditation**

“A Portable Paradise” by Roger Robinson:

And if I speak of Paradise,  
then I'm speaking of my grandmother  
who told me to carry it always  
on my person, concealed, so  
no one else would know but me.  
That way they can't steal it, she'd say.  
And if life puts you under pressure,  
trace its ridges in your pocket,  
smell its piney scent on your handkerchief,  
hum its anthem under your breath.  
And if your stresses are sustained and deadly [sic — daily],  
get yourself to an empty room – be it hotel,  
hostel or hovel – find a lamp  
and empty your paradise onto a desk:  
your white sands, green hills and fresh fish.  
Shine the lamp on it like the fresh hope  
of morning, and keep staring at it till you sleep.

What portable paradise do you carry with you? Sometimes I have carried a “worry rock” in my pocket. These rocks were so named, because when the world was too much or weighted down my shoulders so I could barely stand, I could hold that rock. I could feel the pulse centuries, remembering that the rock was only smooth because of storms and blazing sun, because of what the rock had experienced and encountered. That my own soul, rough and raw in places, becomes smoothed and whole through even the most difficult days.

Other times I have carried a word with me. A word like, “laugh,” or “relax,” or “hope”. Carrying a word with you as the foundation on which you will live and out of which you will seek to speak and how you want to engage others.

Other times I have carried a photograph as my paradise. A picture of my family as the doorway through which I can most easily cross the threshold into the holy. A picture to remind me at the

end of the day it isn't how many likes or people have commented on a sermon that really matters. A reminder that the ones closest to me mean the most to me.

What do you carry?

What tactile, tangible item can you hold in your hands as the holy?

Can you take a piece of bread and sip of juice today as a reminder of God's grace and love for you?

**Prayer: God who crafted, created, and loved into being all that is around us. Move in my midst this day, I pray, that our wills would be one. Amen.**

## **Morning Meditation**

I invite you to say the following prayer slowly. Pause frequently. Let the words sink down deeply. I invite you to use the prayer below like a workbook, filling in the spaces between words and the margins with your experiences. Where do the words below describe you, where do you find your experiences surprisingly being given voice, where do these words get too close for comfort? Pray these words several times over the weekend, each time lean and listening for the holy.

### **Prayer for the week by Ted Loder**

O God gather me now to be with you as you are with me.

Soothe my tiredness; quiet my fretfulness; curb my aimlessness; relieve my compulsiveness;

Let me be easy for a moment.

O Lord, release me from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly; from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip, that I may be open to receiving what you give, to risking something genuinely new, to learning something refreshingly different.

O God gather me to be with you as you are with me.

Forgive me for claiming so much for myself that I leave no room for gratitude; for confusing exercises in self-importance with acceptance of self-worth; for complaining so much of my burdens that I become a burden; for competing against others so insidiously that I stifle celebrating them and receiving your blessing through their gifts.

O God gather me to be with you as you are with me. Keep me in touch with myself, with my needs, my anxieties, my angers, my pains, my corruptions, that I may claim them as my own rather than blame them on someone else.

O Lord deepen my wounds into wisdom; shape my weaknesses into compassions; gently my envy into enjoyment, my fear into trust, my guilt into honesty, my accusing fingers into tickling ones.

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me. Amen.