

# “Breathing, Forgiving, and Peace”

Genesis 20:7, John 20:19-31, Luke 1:77

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When I was in sixth grade, I thought I was going to die. I was playing speedball, a combination of soccer, basketball and football in phy. ed. class. I collided with another player, his shoulder hitting just below my rib cage. I couldn't breathe. I panicked, flailing around desperately trying to breathe in a breath. After what seemed like an eternity, slowly breath seeped into my lungs. Then I could breathe shallow breaths, and after several minutes I delighted in deep breathes. Breathing is essential to physical life and transformation.

Jesus breathed on the disciples to transform their Good Friday nightmares into Easter joy. God is filling you with breath to transform you. **John 20:19-31 MSG** “**Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house. Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, “Peace to you.” Then he showed them his hands and side. The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting: “Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you.” Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said. “If you forgive someone’s sins, they’re gone for good. If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?” But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, “We saw the Master.” But Thomas said, “Unless I see the nail holes in his hands, put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side, I won’t believe it.” Eight days later, Jesus’ disciples were again in the room. This time Thomas was with them. Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said, “Peace to you.” Then he focused his attention on Thomas. “Take your finger and examine my hands. Take your hand and stick it in my side. Don’t be unbelieving. Believe.” Thomas said, “My Master! My God!” Jesus said, “So, you believe because you’ve seen with your own eyes. Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing.” Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book. These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way Jesus personally revealed it.**”

Human life began when God breathed into us. **Genesis 2:7 NLT** “**Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. God breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.**” We experience abundant life when we breathe deep of shalom, wholeness, peace, love, and joy. Learning to spiritually breathe transforms us and transforms the way we perceive others and the world, enabling us to joyfully love.

Richard Rohr wrote, “I cannot emphasize enough the momentous importance of the Jewish revelation of the name of God. It puts the entire nature of our spirituality in correct context and, if it had been followed, could have freed us from much idolatry and arrogance. As we now spell and pronounce it, the word is Yahweh. God’s sacred name was considered a literally unspeakable word for Jews, and any attempt to know what we were talking about was “in vain.” Instead, they used Elohim and Adonai in speaking or writing. From God’s side the divine identity was kept mysterious and unavailable to the mind; when Moses asked for the divinity’s name, he got only the phrase that translates something to this effect: I AM WHO AM....This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations”. This unspeakability has long been recognized, but we now know it goes even deeper: formally the word was

not spoken at all, but breathed! Many were convinced that its correct pronunciation is an attempt to replicate and imitate the very sound of inhaling and exhaling. The one thing we do every moment of our lives is therefore to speak the name of God. This makes it our first and our last word as we enter and leave the world.” For some years now, Richard has taught this to contemplative groups in many countries, and it changes peoples’ faith and prayer lives in substantial ways. He reminds people that “there is no Islamic, Christian, or Jewish way of breathing. There is no American, African, or Asian way of breathing. There is no rich or poor way of breathing. The playing field is utterly leveled. The air of the earth is one and the same air, and this divine wind ‘blows where it will’– which appears to be everywhere. No one and no religion can control this Spirit. When considered in this way, God is suddenly as available and accessible as the very thing we all do constantly – breathe. Exactly as some teachers of prayer always said, ‘Stay with the breath, attend to your breath’: the same breath that was breathed into Adam’s nostrils by this Yahweh; the very breath that Jesus handed over with trust on the cross and then breathed on us as shalom, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit all at once. And isn’t it wonderful that breath, wind, spirit, and air are precisely nothing – and yet everything? Just keep breathing consciously and you will know that you are connected to humanity from cavemen to cosmonauts, to the entire animal world, and even to the trees and the plants. And we are now told that the atoms we breathe are physically the same as the stardust from the original Big Bang. Oneness is no longer merely a vague mystical notion, but a scientific fact.”

God is transforming you with every breath you take. Our breathing connects us with everyone and the entire cosmos. God is loving us through our breathing to bring us into harmony with all people and the cosmos. After God breathed into humanity the breath of life God gave us the Garden of Eden. The tree of life connected all beings in loving harmony. The tree of good and evil was a divider of relationships, a destroyer of harmony and death because of its division. It seduces us into thinking that there is good, better and best, instead of goodness in all choices and beauty in all people. It seduces us to thinking if we separate ourselves from certain people then life will be better; whereas, the tree of life teaches that we will only live life to the fullest when all people unite in harmony. The tree of good and evil wants us to define normal and then categorize and judge. It seduces us into thinking that there is one solution that is better than the others, that can be found when only a few are involved in the decision-making process. It seduces us into thinking there is one spiritual path that is better, one denomination that is better, one religion that is better and it usually is the one we are living. Perhaps our greatest sin is dualistic thinking instead of living in paradox.

People were constantly trying to get Jesus to choose a side; rest or work on the Sabbath, pay taxes or not, who sinned this man or his parents. Notice that Jesus never elevates one side over the other. Jesus came to unite and resurrect everyone. Jesus taught in parables that have different meanings, insights and blessings for each individual, for each moment of our life. Jesus parables are so abundant with blessings that every time we read one, and every person that reads one, receives a unique truth. The parables transform us, and all people, into wholeness, joy and love. Jesus crossed every barrier, ism, and divide to bring as all back together as one worldwide community.

Richard Rohr wrote, “The Kingdom of God is the world without human kingdoms, ethnic communities, national boundaries, or social identification.” Richard calls “contemplation the tree of life, as compared to the other tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because these two serve as idea metaphors for the two minds. The tree of knowledge of good and evil represents ‘either-or’ dualism, which we are strictly warned against and even told not to eat. The tree of life promises access to eternal things, grows crops twelve times a year, and sprouts leaves that are for the healing of the nations. It accesses the deep ground of God and of the self. The contemplative, nondual mind is a tree of continual and constant fruitfulness for the soul and for the world.”

The tree of life at the center of the garden, whose roots extend deep and wide is grace-- forgiveness, that draws all together in joyful, loving harmony. **John 20:20-21** “**The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were exuberant. Jesus repeated his greeting: “Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you.” Then Jesus took a deep breath and breathed into them. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said. “If you forgive someone’s sins, they’re gone for good. If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?”** Forgiveness brings us all together, forgiveness enables us to perceive that we are all connect with the same breath, that we are all on a transformational journey to peace. If we don’t forgive, we hurt ourselves. We become obsessed with a part of creation unable to see the glory of the whole of creation. If we don’t forgive, we divide into republican and democrat spending our energy on fighting, hating, and controlling, rather than spending our energy on uniting, loving and freedom. Scripture proclaims, **Luke 1:77** “**You will know salvation through the mystery of forgiveness.**” Helen Oppenheimer said, “The best rehearsal of all for heaven is to learn to delight in each other.” Having been forgiven, breathed on with life and filled with peace we are sent by Jesus to forgive, breathe on with life and fill with peace.

Mark Brown said, “The resurrection appearances continue in us—we’re the risen body of Christ. Each of us, in a sense, and in a very flawed way, is a resurrection appearance. The story continues—there is no ending to the gospel, because resurrection continues in us.”

Joseph Farber said, “God the source of all breath, life and all blessing, is beyond human knowing or understanding, evercreating, ever-redeeming, ever-restoring. In Jesus’ life and teaching, he showed us how we should live in the world, not condemning others, but always at work to save: healing, feeding, and by the gracious power of forgiveness, restoring right relationship and community. By his death and resurrection, he conquers the fear of death, giving us the freedom to love without limit. By his death and resurrection, he also shows us how God works in the world and in ourselves, always bringing new life out of death, always bringing goodness and even greater life out of the trials of evil and injustice, always transforming the world.”

C.S. Lewis in *The Loin, the Witch and the Wardrobe* portrays the breath of God as warmth that thaws all that have been frozen by hate and death. God continues to fill us with breath to transform us, making us dimensionally transcendent, enabling us to unite with all in love. We see glimpses of it wherever there is forgiveness and peace. John Wesley describes our salvation as a transformation of God’s life giving breath and forgiveness. God is continually breathing grace into us, and we breathe out grateful praise to God. God continually breathes blessings into us, and we breathe out blessings for others.

Albert Einstein, who is a master of both dualistic and non-dualistic thinking, said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. The one to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder, or stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. Their eyes are closed.” Alan Watts said, “We divide in thought what is undivided in nature.”

We are called to breathe, to be disciples, to learn and teach, to follow and lead, to know Christ and show Christ. Richard Rohr describes a disciple as “non-polarity thinking and full-access knowing (prayer), a tolerance for ambiguity (faith), an ability to hold creative tensions (hope) and ability to care beyond their own personal advantage (love).”

Jesus is modeling, teaching, and coaching us to breathe, to open up, breathe in (faith), to pause, hold on (hope) and let go, breathe out (love). Breathing is resonating with the unforced rhythms of grace. Breathing is a tension of holding contraries and inconsistencies together. To breathe you must inhale and exhale. You must do both. You cannot choose to only inhale or to only exhale.

Richard Rohr wrote, “Non-polarity thinking teaches you how to hold creative tensions, how to live with paradox and contradictions, how not to run from mystery, therefore how to actually practice what all religions teach as necessary: compassion, mercy, loving kindness, patience, forgiveness and humility. It allows you to live in the naked now and to resist the pulls toward any shameful past or idyllic future. We have largely been taught the opposite. We judgmentally look for the sin, error or mistake in ourselves or others, not to consider its message for us, but to catch it, hate it, eliminate it and often to project it elsewhere. Such people easily “see the splinter in their neighbor’s eyes while unable to see the log in their own.” We tend to gravity to one side in all of life. Currently most Christian Americans dwell on belief-based religion, defining who is in or out, who is born again, instead of practice based religion that seeks to love and forgive everyone. Many prefer a religion of belonging instead of transformation. We need to learn how to live both, to hold together the contradictory opposites of life, to breathe.”

Breathing is seeing, thinking, living paradoxically—grasping the truth of something that seems a contradiction. God is one and three. God created space and is everywhere. Communion is bread and Jesus. God created time and is timeless. Jesus is paradox; human and God, heavenly and earthly, physical and spiritual, possessing a male body and a female soul, killed and alive, powerless and powerful, victim and victor, failure and redeemer, marginalized and central, singular and everyone, incarnate and cosmic, nailed and liberated. Embracing paradox transforms us to be forgiving, loving and in harmony with everyone and the cosmos.

Richard Rohr wrote, “A paradox is something that initially appears to be inconsistent or contradictory but might not be a contradiction at all inside of a different frame or seen with a different eye. Richard believes that one of religion’s main tasks is to give us eyes for paradox and mystery. Dualistic people use knowledge, even religious knowledge, for the purpose of ego enhancement, shaming and the control of others and themselves, for it works very well in that way. Non-dual people use knowledge for the transformation of persons and structures and most especially to change themselves and to see reality with a new eye and heart. They hold the conflicts of life instead of passing them on or projecting them elsewhere.” The dualistic person is concerned with either, defending or attacking, manipulating or resisting, pushing or pulling. The non-dual person holds creative tension, lives in rhythm and celebrates “and”. Examine any great relationship, any loving marriage, you will find the “and”, the rhythm, the creative tension. Disciples who have discovered how to breathe see goodness in everyone and everything and are for their goodness and celebrate goodness. Disciples stop labeling, ranking and categorizing themselves, people and things enabling them to truly see, which fills them with peace.

If you want to learn more about God’s transforming breath then read Richard Rohr’s *The Naked Now*. Good Friday knocks the breath out of us. Easter enables us to breathe again. Jesus is sending us to help others breathe. Amen