

Prelude

Welcome

Quote from last week, Jean Toomer :

“Worship is a door into (God’s) love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship.”

Today, I invite us to consider that the way that we see and the way that we breathe can be acts of worship, as we move in this world of invisible, life-giving air, and good sustaining ground. To Exist, to see, to breathe, to walk on the Earth is to encounter the HOly.

First Hymn -- Be Thou Our Vision, verses 1, 2, 4, Green 154

Readings

Job 33:4

"The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

Second is from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest and geologist. This excerpt is from his book, *The Divine Milieu*, on which he inscribed the dedication: “*For those who love the world.*”

'By virtue of Creation, and still more the Incarnation, Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see.

Third is commonly attributed to Carl Jung but it is actually a statement that Jung discovered among the Latin writings of Desiderius Erasmus. Jung popularized it, having it inscribed over the doorway of his house, and upon his tomb.

"Bidden or Unbidden, God is present."

Second Hymn -- This is Holy Ground, Green 152

Joys and Concerns

Interlude

Prayer

Holy Spirit, Divine Presence, we need you, we bid you here. Some of us come on our knees, bruised and battered. Some of us are out of breath, running, busy, harried from our journey toward you. We need to feel your presence here today. We invoke our breathing, our own silent waiting, we call for you. We are here, God, are you? Help us to feel your presence here with us today as we worship together, as close as the beating of our hearts. Open the eyes of our in-most hearts so that we can see through your eyes, with love, as we move and walk through this world, through the days of our lives. In love and need we call to you today. Amen.

Third Hymn -- Open My Eyes, That I May See, verses 1 and 2, Green 166

Message

Fourth Hymn -- Amazing Grace, Green 185

Benediction

Go forward now into the world, and let the silent moment between your inbreathing and outbreathing be a moment of grace. Let the air be your neighborhood. Love and serve the Earth, the good, sustaining ground. Place your faith in the unbreakable pulse of life. Feel the breath of God, giving rhythm to your days and opening the eyes of your heart. Be alive on this earth. Look carefully, see deeply, walk on Holy Ground. Breathe.

Message

Just after Christmas, I was driving with my two sons, Cyrus, who is 6, and Cazimer, who is 4, in the back seat. We came to a stoplight, and the car in front of us had a dog in the back. When the dog was facing forward it looked like another human head, with long floppy ears that could have been hair, and when it was facing sideways, it became a dog. And I laughed and pointed it out, and Cyrus, who is six, laughed too and enjoyed the moment, but Cazimer, who is 4, maybe didn't get it, maybe didn't fully understand, or maybe decided that he couldn't see the thing we were chuckling about, although he had a clear view, so the soundtrack of the next 20 minutes was his voice chanting over and over again, "I can't see it,

so it's not there! I can't see it so it's not there!" And of course at that, Cyrus began an answering refrain, "Yes it is! Yes it is! Yes it is!" It was a call and response.

Those twenty minutes were looong. I began to pay attention to my breath. And as I did so (BREATH) it seemed to create space around the cacophony. Their voices began to make me think of God, our cultural arguments about God, and our longing for God. They could have been having an argument about God. Inhabiting the same small space with people not listening to each other, arguing about differing perceptions that couldn't be proven, while having to engage in an important task and pay attention to the constant stream of crucial sensory information coming at me....it felt like an apt and living metaphor for the way that conversations about the "big G" word can tend to happen in our popular culture and political economy.

Their chanting also recalled for me two comments made to me during Advent and Christmas. The first was at a birthday party we hosted right before the holidays. In a conversation about mid-life, about not being at the beginning of our journeys anymore, our friend said these words: **"religion and spirituality are just for those who fear death...People who believe in God are just afraid of dying. Spirituality is just about trying to believe in something that doesn't die."**

A couple of weeks later at Christmas, a close family member who identifies as a born-again Christian said that our lives need to be spent preparing for eternity, for meeting God when we die.

There is alot to unpack in both such bold proclamations. These comments percolated for me all throughout Advent, through the turning toward the dark so as to see the light that shines in the dark, and then the celebration of the coming of Emmanuel, the Light of Christ, God Among us. And I found these comments coming back to me, two polarities in an argument about God, on this drive after Christmas, as my sons squabbled about what Caz did or didn't see, what was real, what was really THERE. Because I think that both my friend and my family member were saying, in their own ways, "I can't see it, so it's not there."

On the one hand, God is a fraudulent or at the least incorrect idea whose sole purpose is to comfort people who fear death, and on the other hand, God is a reality whose purpose is about where we will be for eternity after we die. Either way, underlying both is the assumption that what we call God -- what is Ultimate, what is Holy, what we understand to be Sacred -- is not here in this realm, in this world. God is somewhere else, whether you believe in God or not. God is of the hypothetical or nonexistent or absolute realm after this one, when we are done living.

And I don't think that they are alone in these perceptions and interpretations of our world, our human condition. Our earth. I think that a sense of disconnection from something holy and essential in this present life is not an uncommon experience.

There is truth in the statement that if we can't see something, it isn't there for us. If you are not expecting to see something, you might miss it. Something might be right in front of your eyes, but because you are not looking for it, it is as if it is not there. Social sciences, religion, ecology, psychology -- all have shown that often we are limited in what we can see by what we are conditioned to see, what we are expecting to see. **So, then, if we are not looking for the Sacred among us, God might understandably seem to be absent.**

I know that there are certainly places and situations and things in this world where it can seem to my eyes, that the Holy has fled. It is sometimes so easy not to see or feel God's presence. Not to connect with the Indwelling Light. Not to feel tethered to the Great Dance of Creation. Whatever language you use to describe the Ultimate or the Divine. Not to see That of God.

Why does God sometimes seem so frightfully absent? Is the Sacred present in oncology wards, in children's hospitals, in places of endemic conflict, in faltering ecosystems, in the prisons of North America? In the utter desolation of the inner wars of depression and mental illness, is God here? All of our readings today say YES. Even there. Even there. Even Here. Bidden or Unbidden, Seen or Unseen, God is present. Perhaps God is Presence Itself. "There is nothing here below that is profane for those who know how to see." WOW. On decimated mountain tops?

Even there, there is an unbreakable pulse of Life. Perhaps our very breath is a conversation with God.

I have sometimes spoken in this meeting about my struggle with depression and anxiety. There are certainly times when I have felt only God's absence. More than once, Friends, it has been the act of breathing that has begun my healing from a depressive episode. The act of breathing which has inspired me -- created the space for cleared sight, so that I could see, that the Spirit was always there. The Spirit had never left. Like my breath, God was there, bidden, or unbidden. In the space between inbreath and outbreath, there was grace. How close those words are, respiration and inspiration, Both are related to *spirit*, from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning "breath."

Breathing as an act of faith and as a spiritual practice connects us literally to the body of Earth, to the winds and the waters and the trees, to the Amazon rainforest and the ocean plankton, great lungs of our planet, to everything that is breathing in and out together. All of the air is connected and connects us. Before I started talking about breathing we were all breathing, without consciously thinking about it, not having to say 'ok, next breath, ok, again, and again.' To breathe consciously is to begin to become aware that there is a pulse of life in us, and it is as if we are being breathed by a great consciousness, which is in us as we are in it, and that this breathing, this inbreath and outbreath is the very breath of the Holy I AM.

Breathing is a prayer. Every moment of every day we do this sacred thing.

There are places and situations on this wounded earth that cause me to catch my breath and make me wish to avert my eyes. There are times when my breath is shallow and panicky, for fear of what we have wrought and what the future will hold. I do not know how to resolve the God arguments or heal Earth's wounded places, but I believe that those rifts intersect in the assumption that what is Holy lies elsewhere. And I believe there is no place where the breath of God, the breath of life is not. I know that we can transform the world by the way that we see it. Our faith and our practice is the willingness to see what is being lived and breathed in the world, in all its places, in all its beings. There is something Holy happening

here. And there is no place that the Holy is not. This is always so, whether we see it or not.

Bidden or Unbidden, God is Present.

By virtue of the Creation and Still more, the Incarnation, Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see.

Job 33:4 "The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

