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*Easter Still Coming Towards You*

Alleluia, Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Breathe in, and breathe out.

Science is starting to understand what the Christian and Jewish traditions have always known—there is power in breath.

Is it something we do or just something that just happens? We don't often notice until our breath gets taken away. A quick search reveals a multitude of articles extolling the benefits of breathing, or deep breathing, or doing what some people call *breathwork*. A kind of meditation rooted in becoming present to your breath and breathing deeply. There is a movement to bring breathwork and mindfulness into elementary schools. According to some research, breathwork may boost your mood, decrease high blood pressure, promote creativity and quality sleep, even affect the way that our bodies hold trauma and grief. It is said that deep breathing meditation can actively rewire your brain, even creating new neural pathways.

We know that when we are born we are filled with the breath of God (God formed us from the dust of the earth and breathed into us the breath of life) and when we die our breath returns to God. In Hebrew and in Greek the word breath and spirit are the same.

From chapter one of the gospel of John, the evangelist has been connecting what God is doing in Jesus to creation itself. "In the beginning was the word" would have peeked the attention of his first audience. There are seven signs in the gospel of John, the same as days in a week. (The seventh is the raising of Lazerus, and so the 8th would be the resurrection itself)— which in John happens in a garden of all places). New creation. Starting over. Beginning again. Abundant life. Springtime. Buds bursting from fertile ground. Future opening up. But that's not where we are now.

It's all familiar. Since around the eighth century Christians have entered this scene on the second Sunday of Easter. We know the moves and the characters. They are like old friends. The dizzying mixture of fear and joy that greeted us on Easter morning has worn off. It is now evening and fear has taken hold as it often does, accompanied by its many ghosts. We have gone back to the

way things have always been. It is easy to believe it is better that way. The disciples are huddled together in the upper room behind locked doors.

They have heard rumors, but still find safety in this makeshift tomb. Bolted shut. Their space, past and present, has clearly defined borders and boundaries. As one preacher said, “within walls, behind doors, and afraid.” Locked into shame. Locked in political rhetoric supported by warped religion. Locked in the same old patterns that have grown tired. Locked in relationships or situations that drain you. Locked into predefined expectations. Locked in ways of thinking and believing that keep you and those you love stuck. Locked into the idol of certainty. So firmly in place that something different is almost as terrifying as staying put.

It is in that moment, as it always is, unprompted and unbidden, the risen Jesus finds his way to them. Surprise. Gifts. Abundance. Coming towards them and standing among them. He takes the initiative. Then and now.

He breathes on them. Like in Genesis, in that garden, filling us with the breath of God so we might stand with him. Our bodies are now a home for the Holy Spirit. Your breath and God’s Spirit have become indistinguishable in the mystery of Easter. Yes- God is as close as our breath and theirs as well. God’s Spirit rests upon us.

Both in my time playing the trumpet and singing in a choir I remember the admonition to sing and play from your diaphragm-- from your gut. Breathing deeply is integral to making music and using our voice. Isn’t music always made new whenever the notes are taken off the page and made alive in this particular present moment? A moment that has never existed before. Breathing in resurrection in a world of breathlessness and letting it settle in and oxygenate your cells and then exhaling again.

No locked room or bolted tomb or anything in all creation can separate them from his risen life and God’s unending love any longer. For them, so for us. Nothing- from within or without can keep Christ from you. Still bearing wounds, yours are honored and seen not erased or ignored. They are taken up into that same gentle and unending love of God that continues to open up before you. His real presence and your real presence.

See my hands. Put your hand in my side.

With breath comes peace. A peace that says his risen life is yours as well. A peace that fills and expands your lungs and imagination. A peace that persists, come what may. A permission giving peace that unlocks possibility for all God’s beloved just as it does for Eleni this morning. Peace that opens and expands. His breath creates new neural pathways for the body of Christ.

Lutheran theologian Phil Hefner writes, “*Humans are created by God to be co-creators in the creation that God has brought into being.*” Friends: Our Easter God is still creating in your life and in the life of this wounded and risen assembly.

What will we make together now that the doors are opened and we can feel the fresh air dance upon us? What will we form with our hands and then breathe resurrection into?

Breathe in *alleluia*, *Christ is risen*. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!