

11.30.2022 Advent Midweek Prayer, Week 1

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Genesis 2:4b-7; Psalm 40:3-7; Hebrews 11:1-3

“The breath of life”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

This shape of this year’s Advent midweek service comes from *All Creation Sings*, the new worship resource from Augsburg Fortress. Our midweek Advent series theme this year is aptly titled “Holy interruptions, Holy in-dwellings” reminding us that in the midst of all of the busy interruptions of our lives, God is always with us, dwelling in our lives with grace, peace and hope.

The readings for this evening are intended to encourage us to be mindful of God’s presence in our lives. As I think about the in-dwelling of God in my life, the creation story of Genesis quickly comes to mind (Gen. 2:7): “*Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*”

As we breathe, inhaling and exhaling, we experience the ongoing and constant in-dwelling of the breath of life, which the Creator God first breathed into humanity. Yet, for many of us, breathing is something we take for granted. Who, during childhood, didn’t try and see who could hold their breath the longest? We might attempt to hold our breath, but must always resume breathing. The breath of life is something that not only makes us living beings, but reminds us that our breath is not really our own. Our breathing is at the very center of our created being.

All of us are used to hearing certain idioms, for example, “Well, don’t hold your breath, it’s not going to happen,” or, “You’d better take a deep breath before I share some news with you.” Both of these idioms about holding our breath or breathing deeply are often accompanied with news of interruption or disquiet in our lives. Yet we also know how healthy it can be to take a deep breath or slow our breathing down. This is a well-known method of calming ourselves and refocusing our thoughts. So, breathing also impacts our sense of well-being and our ability to think clearly.

During Advent, which is also accompanied by the busiest cultural season of the year – Christmas – we have an opportunity to take a deep breath, slow down and spend time thinking about God’s presence in our lives. Such moments of meditation and mindfulness, allow us to incorporate our body and mind, integrating our lives with our faith. Like our breath, faith is also an unseen but vital power for living.

Tonight’s reading from Hebrews is a reminder of this, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” By faith we understand that the world and the entire

cosmos were created by the word and breath of God. As Hebrews reads, “*What is seen was made from things that are not visible,*” reminding us that the source of the very atomic structure of the cosmos, the human body, and its particles of oxygen, hydrogen, carbon and nitrogen, which have existed since the “Big Bang” of creation, are also elements of the air we breathe and are part of the fabric of our being.

As we think about God creating us out of the dust of the earth, containing these very elements of the cosmos, stars and the heavens, we realize that the Creator has placed the unseen world of God inside of each of us. During Advent, as we think about the incarnation and a God who dwells in our humanity in Jesus Christ, our faith grasps Christ at the center of creation, as the one who gives meaning to faith, reason and our physical existence.

For Christians, much of this season is about music and song. We sing hymns and carols throughout Advent and Christmas, using our breath to lift our voices in praise of God, our Creator. This evening, Psalm 40 expresses this most eloquently, “*The Lord put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.*” Early Christians were very intentional about calling the *logos* or Word of God, the “New Song.” They said that God created humanity with a beautiful “breathing instrument,” after God’s own image, with the purpose that our voices might reveal God to others. An early Christian writer, named Clement of Alexandria, wrote that the breath and voice that God has given to us is meant to be the instrument revealing God’s creative love to one another.

In other words, the voice that your breath gives life to is an instrument which can speak, sing, praise, lead, reconcile, and even speak words that vanquish death, giving hope.

Christ is the “New Song,” whose voice created the heavens and the earth, and through whom we have life, and in whom, our lives hold together with the oxygen, hydrogen, carbon and nitrogen – the stuff of the stars and the heavens.

Hebrews reminds us that from the beginning of creation, all things were created by the Word of God, and this Word also dwells in us, in our breath, our bodies, our minds and our faith.

As we face another holiday season, look for God in the interruptions and busyness of life. As God has given you breath, anticipate that God will use your breath and your voice to speak and sing, to reconcile and to give hope.

Interruptions are often holy moments in which God allows you become the breath of life – a life-giving voice of hope.

Amen.