

“Pausing on Good Friday”  
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Hickory Neck Episcopal Church – Toano, VA  
Good Friday – April 2, 2010  
John 18:1-19:42

It’s important for us to pause on this day. To remember. To reflect. To be present to the suffering of Jesus.

It would be so much easier to rush right on to the next thing. So much easier to pass by the suffering on the other side of the street and ignore it. So much easier to turn our faces away. So much easier to be distracted and miss it entirely. So much easier to skip over the part that is painful and move directly to the joy that is coming. So much easier to do anything other than watch.

But it’s important for us to pause on this day. To take note. To feel sorrow. To breathe.

I was recently introduced to a new kind of breath prayer. Every time someone leads a breath prayer, I am reminded of how often I forget to breathe. Obviously I don’t literally forget or I wouldn’t be alive. But in the hustle and bustle and anxiety and concerns of the days, I forget to connect with my breath, to breathe deeply, to feel what I’m feeling, to center myself in my breath. I’d like to invite you to join me in this breath prayer.

Please make yourselves comfortable where you’re sitting and close your eyes. To start with, simply notice your breathing.

Then begin to deepen your breathing.

With each inhale, breathe in your worries, concerns, responsibilities, fears. As you exhale, imagine that you are breathing them out, into the breath of God. Breathe in your pain, sadness, anger, and frustration, and then breathe it all out into the breath of Christ. Breathe in your losses, your mistakes, your boredom, your distractions, and then breathe them into the breath of the Holy Spirit. Breathe.

(Pause)

The story of Jesus' passion in the Gospel of John is breathless. From the time that Jesus and the disciples enter the garden after sharing a last meal together, events rush forward until Jesus is hanging on the cross, gasping out his last breath. The soldiers and police come, Judas betrays Jesus, Peter cuts off the servant's ear, Jesus is arrested and dragged to the high priests where he is interrogated, Peter denies Jesus, Jesus is sent to Pilate, the crowd cries out for crucifixion, Jesus is flogged and dressed in a crown of thorns, Pilate gives in under the pressure, Jesus carries his cross, and he is crucified.

Everyone is rushing about. Some are betraying. Some are denying. Some are mocking. Some are flogging. Some are ignoring what is right because it is not popular. Some are caught up in the anger of the moment. Some are following orders. In this great rush to crucifixion there is no time to think, no time to breathe.

Only when Jesus is hanging on the cross, nails piercing his flesh, thorns digging into his scalp, blood running down his beaten and broken body, is there time to breathe, and then there is no breath left. At the foot of the cross stand three women named Mary and the beloved disciple. They watch as Jesus gasps out his last breath. They are present to the end, standing and witnessing even as their hearts were breaking. They did not turn away. They were present to the suffering of their Lord.

It's not easy on this day to take time out from the beautiful weather and demands on our time and our families and friends and work in order to sit with suffering. It's not easy on this or any other day to think about the crucifixion of Jesus, the agony, the blood, the horrible cruelty and shame, the last struggle for breath. It's also hard to think about betrayal and denial and the ways in which we abandon Jesus over and over again.

If we pause, though, if we take the time to turn and watch, if we breathe into the suffering of Jesus, then we will begin to understand how he shares our suffering, how he heals our wounds by taking them into his wounds, how he redeems our death through his death. Our God was willing to become human in the person of Jesus, to suffer the same pain and death that we do, and then to transform that suffering into healing and new life.

It is so very important that we pause on this day. To sit with our Redeemer in his pain. To watch even if it breaks our hearts. To breathe – into the breath of God.