

# **GOD EXHALED**

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**God Exhaled  
Genesis 2: 1-3**

Ten weeks on “enough?” Really? That is the best idea that your pastoral brain trust could come up with as the spiritual focus for leading us into this New Year together as a faith community? Not ten weeks on becoming a more excellent church, or ten weeks to prosperity, or ten weeks on a healthier life?

Ten weeks on “A Life of Being, Having and Doing Enough?” It sounds like “mediocrity” is being proposed as a new core value of this faith community. No one gets excited about anything that is good enough, or strong enough, or smart enough. “Enough” is not something we strive for in our culture; it is something we settle for. “Enough” is what we say when we give up, when we capitulate, when we realize we are never going to attain our goal. “Enough” is an admission of failure. We live in a culture of more. We are constantly striving for lives that are bigger, better, faster, fuller. Enough is a tough sell.

And yet, enough is at the heart of our spirituality. Here at First Congregational Church we have identified “becoming a Sabbath community” as one of our four strategic priorities. Enough is the gift of Sabbath. Enough acknowledges our own human limitations. Enough reminds us that we are not God, we are not omnipotent, we are not omniscient, and we are not omnipresent. We are, always have been and always will be creatures of enough. And God’s relationship with us is rooted in enough. When Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he taught them to pray for enough: “give us this day our daily bread.” The prayer of Jesus is a prayer that reminds us that all we really need is enough for today.

In an essay entitled, “Praying with the Rhythms of Grace, “

Judy Henderson Prather writes, “ Keeping Sabbath realigns us with God’s rhythm, releases our hearts from culture’s stranglehold grip, and opens us to God’s gentle care. It is an act of profound faith; we remember that we are not in charge of the world, but we rest in the arms of the One who is.” In a culture of more, Sabbath reminds us of God’s sufficiency.

In our sacred text today we heard the story of the seventh day of creation. It is the day when God rested. Some people think that creation was finished in six days and nothing happened on the seventh day. But that is not what our text says. In Genesis 2:2 we read, “On the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested....” Rest was part of God’s work of creation. It isn’t what happened after creation was finished. Rest completed God’s creation. And not just the seventh day rest. Rest is part of each day of creation. In the first chapter of Genesis, every day ends with God finishing the work of that day and then admiring it, blessing it, and calling it “good.” Each day of creation ends with the same litany: “And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day...the second day...the third day....”

There is a rhythm to God’s work and it is the rhythm that we are called to embody in our daily lives. It is not the rhythm of more; it is the rhythm of enough. Each day is sufficient. There is no overtime in the creation story, no agonizing over what still needs to be finished, no worrying about the challenges waiting to be met in the new day. Each day ends with a litany of admiration, appreciation and blessing. Each day is enough. And on the seventh day, rest is enough. On the seventh day, no time is given to going back and fine tuning what was accomplished on any of the previous days: no retrofits, no improvements, no corrections. Even with fault lines appearing in the tectonic plates, and the annoying buzz of mosquitoes filling the air, and prostate glands that are prone to cancer, God’s rest is not interrupted to take care of unfinished business. Our

creation myth tells us that God was content to rest all day on the seventh day without interruption.

In the first chapter of his book, “A Life of Being, Having and Doing Enough,” Wayne Muller points out that the Hebrew word for “rested” also translates as “exhaled.” On the seven day of creation, God exhaled. That leads Wayne to ponder: “God exhaled. When do we exhale? Perhaps, like God, we exhale when we feel certain that our good and necessary work is done. What then is our work on the earth? In a world gone mad with speed, potential, and choice, we continually overestimate what we can do, build, fix, care for, or make happen in one day. We overload our expectations on ourselves and others, inflate our real and imaginary responsibilities, until our fierce and tender human hearts finally collapse under the relentless pressure of impossible demands...

We exhale when we feel certain that we have done enough. But how do we even know what enough looks like?

Unfortunately we have grown accustomed to relying on outside sources to tell us when we’ve done enough. We allow ourselves to exhale and rest when everything is crossed off our “to do” list, when the wall clock at the office finally reaches five o’clock, when the last email in our inbox is answered, when the laundry basket is empty, when the pile on the desk is cleared away, when the sun sets and the street lights come on.

But these outside sources are no longer reliable measures of enough. Employers are cutting workers to improve their bottom lines and insisting that those remaining increase their productivity and do more with less. We need to work harder and faster in order to keep up with the competition. Technology now makes it possible for work to follow us wherever we go. It doesn’t get left behind when we leave the office. We take it with us in our smart phones, laptops and wireless internet devices. We live and work in

artificial conditions that can be programmed to stay light and warm long into the night. Boundaries between work and rest are getting blurrier and blurrier and we are losing the sacred rhythm of life modeled by God in our creation story.

So if we can't trust the voices of our culture or even the conditions of our environment to tell us when we have done enough, when we can exhale, when we can stop working and rest and appreciate the goodness of life, what can we trust?

Wayne Muller urges us to begin trusting our bodies. We just finished celebrating Christmas: the incarnation of God in human flesh. Ours is not a disembodied faith. The Apostle Paul once wrote, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Cor 6:19). On the sixth day of creation, God created our bodies and pronounced them "good."

But we have stopped trusting our bodies. Our bodies know when we have done enough. Our bodies are designed to experience fatigue as a form of preserving our health and welfare. But in our culture we treat fatigue as a form of pathology. We imagine that there is something wrong with us if we are tired. We need an antidepressant if we don't have enough energy to get up and do the things we think we ought to be doing. We need a jolt of coffee if we start to feel sluggish mid morning or mid afternoon. We need an analgesic if our muscles begin to ache with fatigue. We need an increase in our eyeglass prescription if our eyes get fatigued from reading too long. We need migraine medication if our brains ache with fatigue.

If we are going to start trusting our bodies to signal enough, then we are going to have to stop treating fatigue as a symptom of pathology. Fatigue is the body's signal of enough. When our brains are fatigued, we need to stop concentrating and take a break. When our bodies are

fatigued, we need to stop working and rest. When our spirits are fatigued we need to stop pushing and attend to our experiences of grief and loss.

And our bodies get re-calibrated for enough every day. We can't go by what was enough a year ago, or a month ago, or even a day ago. Every day is different and every day we have to pay attention to what our bodies are telling us about enough.

Ten weeks of enough? Really? In a culture that is obsessed more, in a culture that is constantly blurring the boundaries between work and rest, in a culture that considers enough a sign of failure instead of faithfulness, I am confident that ten weeks won't be too much of enough. "A Life of Being, Having, and Doing Enough," is not something to settle for. It is something to strive for. It is the faithful embodiment of Sabbath life, life that follows the sacred rhythm of creation, of work that is sufficient for the day and rest that brings appreciation, admiration and blessing to each day of our lives. Enough begins in bodies. It begins with learning to exhale. Amen.



