

God Exhaled: Reclaiming the Exhale

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Genesis 2:1-3

When I was working with homeless youth in Los Angeles, I remember one specific instance when I sat down with a client just to check in and see how she was doing. Now, mind you, most of these young adults only get one maybe two meals a day from local drop-in centers, like ours. As we talked, she ate her cup of ramen noodles and small pouch of fruit snacks. When it came to her cheetos, she opened them up, ate a couple, and asked if I wanted them. Knowing her situation and lack of resources, I said, "Oh, no I'm good thanks though. Don't you want them?" "Oh, Ems, I've had enough. I'm full." "Well, save them for later," I said. This young woman who has nothing was offering me some of her food because she knew that she had enough to fill her up for the time being.

How do we know when we've had or done enough? Is it when we're so full we have to unbutton our pants? I know you've been there. Have we done enough shopping when we've spent all the money in our wallet? Have you done enough when you've checked all the things off your list? Have you become enough when you get to the highest position in your company? Do you keep striving because the world says you need more, even though you may be content where you are?

Please join me in prayer... Gracious God who knows when to stop, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight for you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So these questions. These questions are difficult because they require us to do a bit of truth-telling. They help us see

more clearly the truths that our bodies hold in the midst of an anxious society. Everyday we ask ourselves these questions of “enough” and sometimes we answer them without even thinking twice. Sure, I’d love a pay raise. Yes, of course I will add that task to my list. Yup, I’ll buy that thing because it will make someone in my life happy. Yes, yes, yes, we say. We are always adding onto our never ending to do list, striving to become something more than who we already are, and end up having more than we really need. Speaking of truth-telling, let’s think about this a little bit. What do these habits of being, having and doing tell us about our relationship to God? In our text for this morning we read that on the 7th day God rested. Literally translated that phrase can say, “God exhaled.” But God didn’t exhale because God was done creating. Did you hear that in the scripture this morning? Verse two tells us that God finished the work that God had done and God rested from all the work. It doesn’t say that God finished creating the world and then stepped back, wiped her hands clean of the project and let it go. God finished the work that God had done and exhaled. In those six days of creation, God had created enough for the time being.

You see, this question of enough has little to do with you and everything to do with God.

We see God leading by example, right? We too are meant to discern for ourselves when enough is an okay thing. Because we live in a society where there are all of these outer voices telling us that there is always lots to do, more to be and much to have, we get wrapped up in conforming to these wants, not needs, but wants of the world. But this discernment piece is tricky, right? We don’t have magical answers that will make it easy to figure out when to take a break or when to breathe, or when to stop buying things, right? I don’t think there’s an app for that. It’s just not that easy. Having, being, and doing enough is a matter of faithful and honest discernment. Perhaps a good question

to ask as a starting point is “where in my life has ‘not enough’ of one thing impacted ‘enough’ of something else?” For example, have your efforts to move up in your company impacted how much time you spend with family? Where have your endeavors to gather more material things affected your relationship to God? There is a different question in here for each of us, I believe, because this idea of enough is an assessment of values, an assessment of what matters most to us.

We all know the 10 commandments, and if nothing else, we know that we’re not supposed to murder, lie, cheat, steal, etc. We all hold those to a high degree in our lives. Perhaps that is because the law also has something to say about them, that if we do these things we could end up in jail. But nonetheless, we’re following the rules, for the most part. Now, y’all know that “Keep the Sabbath Holy” is one of those commandments too, right? Well, then, what happened? Somewhere along the way we lost respect for Sabbath and maybe that’s because the local government has nothing to say about rest. But just as our well-being depends on not murdering someone and going to jail, so too our lives also depend on taking rest.

As our text reads, God not only took a break from creating, but God blessed that day of rest and made it holy. God made it sacred. God made it what? Sacred. The seventh day, when God rests it is the first, the very first sacred thing, before any other part of Creation. God hallowed the seventh day. To hallow something means to greatly respect it. And we talk all the time about how we need to respect others, respect our bodies, respect differences, respect, respect, respect. But when did we forget to respect rest? Just as rest is sacred, so are our bodies.

We talked a couple weeks ago at Awestruck about how we are both fully human and fully divine. We are both things in one body and that is to be upheld with love and compassion and grace. More than anything else, our bodies know what

is enough. Thought, most of the time we aren't paying attention until it's too late. When we get nervous or anxious about something we oftentimes feel butterflies in our stomachs. We tend to push ourselves to the max until we get sick and collapse from exhaustion. We work so hard and clench our muscles when we are stressed and never find the time to let them relax.

We've all heard the phrases "listen to your heart" and "go with your gut." Well, church, these are no joke. There is nothing more honest than the Truth(s) of our bodies. Ever. Too often we put off our own well-being to be more, rather than taking preventative measures to ensure that we keep our bodies in check.

Before I moved to Los Angeles last year, I told myself it was going to be a year full of change and growth and self-care management. Knowing that I am going into a field that has an incredibly high burnout rate, I decided this would be a good first step. A preventative measure, if you will. I knew that working 40 hours a week and living in intentional community would drive me to exhaustion. So, while I lived in LA, I began running five times a week and went to church on Sunday mornings. I planned time for myself and rarely shifted my schedule away from that. And now, since I have moved up north to Berkeley, CA and started seminary, I exercise on a regular basis and, as an added bonus, you can find me every Tuesday night at a local spot with a group of seminary students singing karaoke. Yup. I sing karaoke. See, not only are these things intentional rest for me but they have become spiritual practices. They are holy to me. They are sacred.

In his book, Wayne Muller talks about having enough, being enough and doing enough. At this point in my life, I have somehow, by the grace of God, figured out how best to manage 'doing enough.' Due to circumstances and life changes, I know this will change, but for now, I have it figured out. However, having and being enough are

completely different stories. For all of us, myself included, I come back to the question: what do our habits tell us about our relationship to God? Are we being faithful consumers? Do our intentions and ambitions come from a place that reflects the love and mercy of God? I have found that when we take a step back to breathe or relax or stop doing whatever we're doing, that things become infinitely clearer. So how do we faithfully respect the exhale? How do we manage living in a society that always wants more of us?

Take a deep breath in... and let it out...

Let's start there. Let us start by breathing and discerning and loving God. Let us call to mind the things that hold importance in our lives: the things that matter to us in our relationship to our bodies, in relationship to people, and in relationship to God. Having, being and doing enough is a matter of faithful and honest discernment. By reclaiming the exhale, we respect God. Because when we allow for room to breathe, we allow space for grace. And God's grace, above all else, is enough. Amen.

