

Sunday, August 15, 2021
The New Challenges of Being Human
Rev. Dawn Fortune

Every great fiction story follows a basic narrative that includes the main character somehow being separated from their support system their family their neighborhood their community or whatever and forced to go on this adventure or this journey of self discovery and struggle. The isolation from others is key too the growth that the character experiences. They have to figure things out on their own. They take the lessons that they've learned so far in life and apply them to their new situation and they learned that some things work and some things don't in these other situations. Often the story line contains new characters that act as supporting characters to serve as a literary tool through which the character can reflect and observe their own experience.

We've all had something of a journey these past 16-18 months: we have been isolated after a fashion from our communities and this isolation has caused us – willing or otherwise – to experience a period of struggle and growth and change.

When this pandemic hit and we had to close everything down back in March of 2000 I said to you that we would get through this but that we would be changed in a fundamental way by this experience. Now we've gone through over a year of this journey and we are in a place now where we can make some progress about returning to community and seeing one another in person again.

Like characters in novels returning home is not all we imagined. We have changed. Our friends will have changed some of us have gained weight some of us have lost weight. During our journey, separated from

Our social network of support, we have been left to our own devices in a way that permits us or perhaps *forces* us to refocus our priorities. Things that used to be important to us became less so, and we moved things up and down the hierarchy of what is significant to us. Each of us has done this in one way or another and so when we come back together it's going to be a little bit unsettling.

During the course of that fictional journey of discovery the character's priorities get distilled down to that very basic level Thoreau wrote about while in his retreat at Walden Pond – reducing life to its meanest terms, getting to the very marrow of the thing and knowing its most elemental bits.

We are blessed to be outside today on our beautiful campus among the pines and the oaks with the air still heavy from last night's rain.

I want you to get comfortable settled into your chair find a way that that doesn't hurt your back that allows you (ideally) to put your feet on the ground and I want you to close your eyes if you're able and I want you to breathe in and breathe out.

Breathe in and breathe out; breathe in and breathe out.

Now I'd like you to chant in the style of one of a meditation on breathing. There are three or three voices in that particular piece and we don't spend a lot of time talking about the drone which is the background hum – sort of low and rumbly. Let's do the breathing in and out exercise again but this time let's put voice to it and so we say together: *breathe in breathe out.*

Let's do that together for a bit *breathe in breathe out.*

Now while you're chanting I'm going to talk a little bit

breathe in breathe out

I want you to notice the air: pay attention to the air; to the smells you might be able to smell: the Pines, the pollen, the wild flowers, the smell of the wet grass, the smell of the wet forest floor behind you.

Smell the air. Visualize those natural elements breathing in to your body.

Breathe in the present, breathe out the past.

Breathe in the hope of a new time, breathe out the frustrations of the past.

If you are watching online, join us as we breathe in the new, breathe out the old.

breathe in breathe out

Let's stop chanting for a minute. [Bring chant to close]

In the last 18 months the way we express our feelings and our emotions has had to change. We can't just get together with friends over a cup of coffee across the kitchen table or at a restaurant. Lacking familiar ways to express ourselves, sometimes we don't express ourselves at all.

Bottled up feelings cause imbalance in our emotional and mental health. Like all things, our hearts and minds, as well as our bodies, need balance to be healthy.

Let's go back to the drone chant. I want to change our words and I would like us, when we sing breathe in let's say *breathe peace* and then when we exhale we'll say *breathe love*.

Join me in this *breathe peace, breathe love; breathe peace, breathe love*.

OK so now let's use the words and melody that is familiar to us.

When I breathe in I breathe in peace.

when I breathe out I breathe out love

when I breathe in I breathe in peace

when I breathe out I breathe out love.

Let's continue to chant together and if those words are too much for you to remember that's OK; you can choose to chant the drone part *breathe in breathe out*.

Let's continue

breathe in breathe out

when I breathe in I breathe in peace

when I breathe out I breathe out love

OK continue that. Keep chanting now as I say a few things.

As you're breathing, if you're able I want you to connect to the ground beneath you. If you're wearing sandals perhaps slip them off and let your feet touch the floor where you are or the grass here outside.

Feel the earth beneath you. Feel the power of the natural world of which we are a part. Feel your connection to the trees whose roots are running under where you sit; to the grass roots intertwined to hold the topsoil together to feed the trees nutrients and water.

Feel that connection with the birds that we hear in the trees with the sound of the wind to the oaks and the pines.

Feel that deep connection. *breathe in breathe out*.

Continue chanting please.

Members of this congregation have a deep connection to this land this precious fragile piece of protected pinelands. Feel that connection now: feel how important it is to this community to be in relationship with this earth. Feel the woods surround you, tower over you.

Feel the presence of all of the living creatures that share this space with us in this moment: the birds in the trees the squirrels in the trees the chipmunks that run around on the ground, the snakes and feast on small things in the woods, the bees and other insects that do the job of pollinating the world and providing food for all of the creatures in this ecosystem.

Feel your connection with that. Feel your connection with this simple piece of earth that is connected in amazing ways to the larger planet, to the cosmos, to the universe.

Feel the connection with each other. Feel the presence of the people next to you. Feel the presence of the people who are joining us online who are participating at home.

breathe in breathe out

Feel your connection to the earth and understand that our connection to nature is part of our very beings. We are a part of the vast universe of all creation and understanding that we are connected is the foundation of our spiritual being. The ocean touches our hearts and we can feel the waves in our heartbeat. We can feel the heartbeat of the earth beneath us.

Let us understand that no matter how we have changed or how we have grown or what lessons we have learned in the past year and a half that we are still connected in this very basic way: we are still connected to the earth beneath us, to the air that we breathe in and out and in and out and to the wide universe beyond where we can see.

Let's bring our chant to a close for a bit.

Politicians are fond of saying that that which connects us is so much more significant than that which divides us. I really wish politicians hadn't said that because it's really useful and it's really good and it's really true and now it sounds trite but it's true: what connects us is so much more significant than anything that divides us.

When we think about what are our most fundamental principles, our most fundamental values: that everyone has inherent worth and dignity, that everyone is worthy of love, that everyone deserves happiness and joy, that we don't want to hurt each other: these are the foundations of *us*.

Let us connect this morning and each day. I invite you to breathe in and breathe out and know that everyone of us here is breathing in and breathing out and that we are all connected by the air that we breathe.

Physicists tell us that there is nothing new in the world: there's the exact same number of atoms now as there was at the moment the universe began. Matter cannot be created nor destroyed, so the air that we're breathing in and out has been here forever. It has been a part of every plant, every creature, every person, the glaciers and the volcanoes and the plains and the sea.

Like the monks in our reading today, we know the divine in each other. We see it, we feel it, we connect to it organically.

We are connected, *deeply* connected by something so much bigger than ourselves and is our time that we shared together that permits us to celebrate that in community.

We're going to have to learn how we fit together again after this time of separateness, but that will be made easier by remembering how connected we truly are.

Blessed be and amen.