

Good evening everyone! And welcome to our second Wednesday Mt. Zion-line worship video! I hope you enjoyed the first part of the Holden Evening Prayer liturgy, performed by our very own talented musicians at Mt. Zion. If you haven't watched the "Part 1" video of the Holden Evening Prayer yet, I would encourage you to go back and watch it! And once my sermon and scripture video here is complete, I would encourage you to watch the "Part 2" video to close out our worship experience this evening.

For our Scripture and sermon video tonight, I would love to begin with a meditation practice. This practice combines our earlier practice of Dwelling in the Word with a little twist related to tonight's theme. So to begin, I would love for all of you to gently close your eyes and take a deep breath in. And slowly let that breath out. As I count to three keep your next inhale going. And exhale, 2, 3. Let's count to four now, inhale 3, 4. And exhale, 2, 3, 4. And up to five, (count), and exhale (count). Back down to four inhale (count). And exhale, 2, 3, 4.

This breathing practice helps to center us in the moment and feel alive. The same breath that is in you now is the breath of life God gave Adam from the earliest moments of creation. (By the way, the name Adam comes from the Hebrew *adam*, which means humanity. So really, Adam is the beginning of humanity, who God drew up from the Earth and into whom God breathed holy life.) We are connected in our life together by the power of the Spirit, the holy spirit which is the breath of life, which grounds us and reminds us that we are God's holy creation. Breathing calms us as we are reminded of this holy life of God flowing through us, a very real and tangible reminder that we are created, beloved children of God. Nothing we do or encounter will stop the truth of God's creation from being our reality. We can always be centered on our breath, the very breath of God that gives us light and life.

In times of anxiety or not being able to sleep well or just feeling overwhelmed, I do this very breathing practice to feel centered in the midst of unhappy chaos. Our breath is always with us, keeping us alive, a reminder of to whom we belong and who loves us more than we could possibly fathom. Starting simple with breath and numbers leads to this place of calm, this place of rest in the promises and love of our Creator. And so as we join together in worship this evening, I invite you all to continue this breathing practice.

Let's keep breathing, slow ourselves down, and stay present as we meditate on our scripture reading this evening, the Creation story, Genesis 1:1-2:3.

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

*And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome*

*from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

*And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

*And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

*And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

*And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.*

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."*

*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps*

*on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

The Word of the Lord.

Right now it feels like we are re-creating our entire world. We are faced with a situation for which we have hardly any context, a crisis not faced in our country for over a lifetime. From crisis and chaos though, new life is found, new things are created. How fitting that in springtime, as the grass gets greener and new plant life springs forth that we are in the midst of re-creating our lives too. New routines, new connections, new appreciations for things overlooked, and new timings can be both overwhelming and life-giving.

But what I want to focus on tonight is how we can celebrate all that God has hallowed, or made holy. A crucial piece of this creation process that we often overlook is the last day, the ending of the creation story, which is the Sabbath, the holy, holy rest.

After creation of all the world around us, the whole cosmos coming into existence, God rested. God took holy sabbath time to breathe and rest amidst the creation that God deemed good.

We, as part of God’s holy creation, are deserving of this holy rest. We belong to the God who created us and the earth of which we were made and in those things we can find hallowed rest. We need sabbath. We need time and space of letting go and calling things good in order to live into the roots of our creation. If God can rest, then we can too. And we must.

We know now that this time of social distancing and quarantine is going to go on for a while - longer than the initial 3-week estimate. It’s likely going to be closer to a couple of months. So let’s take some time to continue our breathing and realize we don’t need to keep sprinting. We cannot keep living well without taking time for holy rest. We can transition into a slower pace, a marathon if you will, and just take time to experience life as it happens for us. We can let go of the necessary but exhausting initial rush of changing our lives so drastically. Our initial plans have been made that we will follow through on. We’re starting to figure out what a new day-to-day routine might encompass. We’re learning new technology and ways of connecting. And that connection is both virtually and in our homes, connecting in new ways with the people we live with, with the creation that surrounds us, our families, ourselves, and our God.

So let’s focus on what those connections can be. Let’s breathe new life into the connections that are most crucial and life-giving for us. Let’s enjoy the space to reach out and connect with people we haven’t spoken to in a while or enjoy a phone or video chat with those we love and

miss the most. Let's take Sabbath ourselves. Let's rejuvenate our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits with a holy rest and slowing down. Let's see this time as a gift to dwell with one another and not have to rush from thing to thing. We can be renewed by the rest we find in God, the rest we find in breathing deeply and connecting with our spirits. We are worthy of this Sabbath rest, we are holy in taking this time to savor Sabbath, we are blessed to connect with our loving God in this gift, a holy season of Sabbath.

So as we end our scripture and sermon time and move into our Sabbath rest for the evening, let us join together in a moment of prayer.

*Good and gracious God, we come to you tonight with a myriad of feelings, experiences, concerns, and wonderings. We come to you with heavy hearts burdened by an anxiety of newness and rushing. We pray Lord that you will remind us of our holy createdness, that we are worthy of your most holy Sabbath rest. We pray that we may find that rest throughout this season, that we can truly dwell in the calm and peace of a season of Sabbath.*

*Lord we know not everyone has this opportunity for Sabbath as they are working harder than ever, and we pray for these people on the front lines: healthcare workers, mail and delivery folks, grocery store and pharmacy workers, farmers and manufacturers, emergency services and dispatchers, researchers, those who govern, all the families and parents working to provide school and comfort for their kids, and for all the people stepping up to help one another in loving kindness.*

*We come to you Lord in gratitude for their work and in hope that we may all find rest. We pray that we may continue to be beacons of your hope and agents of your love in our world.*

*Strengthen us for these times ahead, and give us comfort as we rest in your promises of new life. In your Son Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Thank you for worshipping tonight. May peace be with you all. Amen.