

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
Proper 13, Year C
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Life is dependent on breathing. Breath is life.

In Genesis 2:7 we read: "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." At creation the man breathed in the breath of God and breathed out the breath of life and he breathed in and he breathed out.

Life is dependent on breathing.

In his commentary, "Provoking the Gospel of Luke," Richard Swanson states that when Adam breathed in, God created. When Adam breathed out, in a sense, God's act of creation was imitated, God's act of sharing life was imitated. Breath in life from God; breath out and share life. (Provoking the Gospel of Luke, Richard W. Swanson, p. 174-175)

Until reading Swanson's commentary I had not thought of breath in that way. Oh, I have many times focussed on breathing - when I exercise, when I climb the hill out of Old Town Cottonwood to my home, when I gave birth to each of my three children, when I meditate. I just never thought of it in this way that each time that we breath we share in God's creation. Breath in life from God; breath out and share that life with the world.

Jesus asks us to live our lives in a way that is based on this understanding of breathing. When Jesus tells us to be rich toward God, as he did at the end of today's Gospel reading, when Jesus tells us this he is saying that to be rich toward God is when we, like the Good Samaritan that we heard about a few weeks ago, to be rich toward God is when we use our resources for the benefit of our neighbor. Breath in - accumulate resources. Breath out - share these with our neighbor.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is saying that the farmer has only breathed in, he has not breathed out.

And you know as well as I do that we can not breath in and then hold our breath indefinitely. If we do, we will die. Just as the farmer dies.

To be clear, with this Gospel Jesus is NOT saying that it is bad to be successful. Not at all. But, and this is an important point, Jesus IS saying that in order to be rich toward God, in order to live in God's great abundance, we must breath in, perhaps in our accomplishments, our successes, our finances, or like the farmer, our crops. However, if we then hold our breath, if our life is nothing more than our accomplishments, if our success is not shared, if our finances and our crops are stored away and never shared, we will die.

Breath in, breath out.

The farmer, just like the younger brother at the beginning of today's Gospel, was concerned only with his own welfare. The farmer and the younger brother were breathing in and holding it. Jesus was not against riches. Instead, he always pointed to the life threatening nature of riches; he pointed to the truth that in our accumulation of riches we just might forget to share, we just might forget to breath out.

And that is the problem that I see with the once popular Prosperity Gospel, the Gospel that states that God rewards the faithful with prosperity. Pray for, maybe even demand prosperity and God will provide it. Oh, the Prosperity Gospel does suggest that we should be givers but our giving is only for our personal gain. The Prosperity Gospel teaches it's followers that you should give because you will get a just reward in return. Gloria Copeland, in her 2012 book, "God's Will is Prosperity," stated that if you give away \$10, you will receive \$1,000; if you give away \$1,000, you will receive \$100,000. (The Gospel Coalition by David W. Jones.) Well, now, this gives me a good idea. Maybe we can increase our church budget with this. How about you each give the church an extra \$1,000? According to the Prosperity Gospel, if you do, you will receive \$100,000. Hmmm. The possibilities are huge, we all benefit. Except that we understand this Prosperity Gospel to be a false Gospel. Followers of the Prosperity Gospel are only breathing in and holding their breath.

As followers of Jesus (and I believe this is true in every religion) whatever we gain, if we are really going to live, we then need to share what we have gained.

Breath in, breath out.

In the wonderful book, "Black Elk Speaks, the life story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux," we are told about a hunt that the tribe went on. "The head man of the advisers went around picking out the best hunters with the fastest horses, and to these he said: 'Good young warriors, my relatives, your work I know is good. What you do is good always; so today you shall feed the helpless. Perhaps there are some old and feeble people without sons (to hunt for them), or some who have little children and no man. You shall help these, and whatever you kill shall be theirs.' " (p.43)

Sharing what they killed to help those who could not hunt was a great honor for the best hunters. Sharing what they had hunted and not stockpiling for themselves, actually not keeping anything for themselves, was their goal.

Breath in, breath out.

For us, today, certainly continue to work for riches and success; certainly continue to make preparations for the future. But, if we don't share what we have, then Jesus tells us that we are not truly living in the way that God created us to live. If we don't share, then we are breathing in and holding our breath.

Life is dependent upon breathing in and breathing out.

Breath in, breath out and live.