

Third Sunday after the Epiphany - January 26, 2025

Isaiah 2:1–5; Psalm 119:10–18; 1 Peter 1:22–25; Luke 4:38–44

“Self-Care”

1. It seems like such an unnecessary reminder, but I can tell you from experience that when I am under stress and someone says to me “Remember to Breathe” it actually helps me if I do it.
  - a. Now, of course I had already been breathing when they gave me the reminder
    - i. Even as my stress levels were off the charts,
    - ii. even as I got tunnel vision focused on whatever crisis was pressing on me
    - iii. It’s just that I was breathing really shallow, tiny breaths.
    - iv. Enough to keep the body going, I guess.
    - v. Not enough to support life, not in a broader sense.
  - b. When I have had enough self-awareness to take their advice, it has helped
    - i. I don’t know the physiology of it all, really, how our body works.
    - ii. I just know that in that moment of stress, taking a deep breath did something.
    - iii. It slowed me down. It made me focus on something other than the crisis, and actually allowed me to be more present to face my challenges
  - c. I have recently gotten reacquainted with the crucial work performed by my lungs because this month I started swimming laps in the pool at the gym.
    - i. It sounds way more impressive than it actually is.
    - ii. This is my way to cross train so that I can get back to running (and give my knees a break from hitting the pavement)
    - iii. I sort of know how to swim but I am sure my technique is terrible
    - iv. I got some tips from Tom Carmichael, who has swum all his life, and who has both competed as a swimmer and coached the sport.
    - v. So, to start, I have been swimming 8 lengths of the pool. 200m, twice a week. That’s about all I can manage.
    - vi. I’m sure the gym staff are amused to see me enter and exit the gym so quickly!
    - vii. I use different swimming strokes: Half free style, half breaststroke, half dear-God-whose-idea-was-this.
    - viii. The exertion is different than when running, and again, it may well be that I am doing it all wrong and inefficiently, and that I am out of shape, but it feels like my body just can’t get enough breath in.
    - ix. It’s like the water is pressing in on me, and I’m not too proud to swim a length, pause a few seconds to catch my breath, and then get back at it.
2. Our passage today presents Jesus in a flurry of healing activity, with the whole world pressing in on him, and it seems like he is hardly able to catch his breath
  - a. The passage is one healing after another
  - b. We get the specific detail that he healed the mother-in-law of one of his disciples, Simon Peter.

- c. Then the crowds got word of his healing abilities, and they started coming late in the day, as the sun was setting
  - d. The people gathered at the house, seeking, pleading for healing
  - e. Family members were the ones bringing their loved ones for Jesus to heal.
  - f. And Jesus was compassionate, and patient, (and even a bit stern with the unclean spirits trying to out Jesus as the Messiah before he was ready to release that news)
  - g. It kind of sounds from the passage like Jesus did that marathon healing almost to the break of day,
  - h. He managed to head out to a deserted place, by himself. In other similar stories, this is an indication he's going to pray. To recenter.
  - i. He was trying to catch his breath
  - j. But the crowds were persistent, they were advocating for their relatives.
  - k. They found him and tried to hold him, to make him stay.
  - l. But Jesus, having just managed a little respite, told them he had to keep going to the next towns, to preach, to teach, to heal.
  - m. Some reluctantly let him go. Others spread the word and probably followed this healer to the next town with their sick loved ones in tow.
3. A relevant question for us is how we care for ourselves and for each other in a time of frantic activity, or paralyzing worry, or mental health struggles.
- a. Our Deacons want to help us catch our breath, and to help others feel supported
  - b. I am so proud of their Heads Up initiative, a mental health and wellbeing effort for 2025 focusing ministry on training, education, support, celebration and growth.
  - c. The program is the vision of deacons Scott Weathers, Sandy Thomas, Julie Orben and Sarah Sanders, and it is made possible by a matching grant from the Center for Congregations and one from our FPC Foundation.
  - d. We want to create a safe environment in the church where people feel comfortable saying "this is where I am in my mental health journey"
    - i. To share knowing that the other person will listen without judgement, without a reflex to "fix" it.
    - ii. To share knowing that people will pray and support one another
    - iii. Because there are good days and bad, weights that feel heavier sometimes
    - iv. It is important to know another church member will listen with compassion
  - e. We kicked off our education projects two Saturdays ago with Rev. Dr. Marcus Carlson (we had over 60 people at his workshop!)
  - f. We hope you and the community will have the opportunity to take part in traditional mental health training events (like on stress reduction) and also innovative activities (like making art to integrate conversations of our faith and mental health).
  - g. And still most exciting for the team is the creation of peer support groups.
    - i. The vision is to have peer groups for teens, adults, seniors, caretakers, and people coping with grief.
    - ii. The adult support meetings will be every other Saturday afternoon, starting March 1 led by Sandy Thomas
    - iii. And youth meetings for teenagers will be every other Tuesday evening starting March 4, led by Olivia Weathers (Tess and Scott's daughter)

- iv. Stay tuned for other groups forming.
  - h. And we will celebrate our progress and plant these seeds so that some elements of this special year can continue as efforts in the church which continue to give fruit.
- 4. Whether you are the one seeking to catch your breath, or you are advocating for a loved one to get the support and care they deeply need, we are all in this together as a caring community of the people of God. We come to Jesus, and we bring our loved ones, and we journey together on the road to wellbeing. We pray it will feel like a breath of fresh air.