

Easter in Every Breath

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This is a very meaningful Easter for me, because one month and two days ago my dad died. Many of you knew him. He was our Pastor Emeritus. He had a disease which slowly took his breath away. He was eighty-four.

Dad was the last of a family of fifteen, so Dad wanted people around him all the time. For a month or so, my dad had to stay in a nursing home. For him, it was sheer torture. I'd wonder, "God, why are you putting him through this? Such painful longing and empty places. He not only has to surrender his breath but also the desires of his heart."

Thankfully, Dad was able to die at home. Yet he still had a desperate wish: He longed to come back to church one last time. He hadn't been here since the last week in October. You may remember him: the little, old man with the oxygen bottle camped out on the leather couches in the lobby telling everybody how wonderful they were. That was my dad. Well, Dad wasn't strong enough to make it back to church.

It's hard to witness those unfulfilled longings.

My dad loved the mountains, and he loved horses. I think that's how I'll remember him best: climbing mountains and talking about his old horse. I remember a day about ten years ago, we tried to climb a mountain, and Dad just couldn't. He fell over on his granddaughter, and we had to turn back. He was embarrassed and confused as to what was wrong. It was his lungs. He was beginning to yield his breath and his delights.

I've wondered, "Lord, why the suffering? Why not end it in a moment? Why do you only increase this painful longing?"

It's hard to watch someone slowly die.

Suzie Livingstone was a very attractive, young woman in our college group in California. She'd been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Her mother was in a nursing home somewhere in the Midwest suffering from the same disease. Her father was remarried and didn't want to deal with another cripple. In short order, Suzie was confined to a bed in a nursing home surrounded by senile, elderly, incontinent people.

One day I baptized Suzie in her wheelchair in front of the church in Danville. She used to always remind me of that day, when I expressed concern for her sufferings. She'd pray for me over the phone that I'd have faith, hope, and love for my new job in Colorado. Suzie had incredible faith, hope, and love. She earnestly prayed to be healed, but she wasn't. Several years ago she died.

She never really complained, but she had one desperate longing: to be married. Toward the end, her body tied itself into a knot. Her legs locked together, and her speech slurred. I remember her crying out, "I was made for love, and I want a lover . . . but I can't!" Such longing unfulfilled, such hope left empty.

It's hard to watch someone die.

And I suppose we're all dying. With every breath, we expire a bit.

I have a friend who had to watch some of her children die through abortion and abuse. She longs for her children with an ache you can taste. Why is there such longing in this world?

In the end, more than any other tangible thing, I think my dad longed for breath. My dad was very courageous, but I think I saw fear in his eyes. His eyes would grow big as he'd gasp for breath that wasn't there. Dr. Paul Brand writes, "I know of no human experience that produces such a spasm of uncontrolled panic as does breathlessness." In the end, there was no breath. And Dad expired.

In the beginning of my children's lives, they *inspired*, and I got to watch it. I remember the anticipation and relief as each of them took that first big gasp of air and let out a scream. It was a thrill.

It's hard to watch someone expire
but a thrill to watch someone *inspire*.

In the beginning, God inspired Adam (mankind). God fashioned dust and breathed His breath into the dust, and man (Adam) became a living soul. It's as if God created the human soul by blowing a place of emptiness into the dust with His breath, like blowing lungs into clay.

- The Hebrew words "neshawmah" and "ruach" are each translated as breath and spirit. In Greek, "pneō" is breathe or spirit as a verb, "pneuma" is breath or spirit as a noun, and "pneumōn" is lung.
- The English word spirit comes from the Latin "spiritus," which is literally breath. So we *expire*, which is breathe out, and we *inspire*, which is breathe in.
- In Greek, "ekpneō" is breathe out or expire, and "empneō" is breathe in or inspire (in-spirit).

Well, in the beginning God inspired Adam: breathed into him . . . like a kiss. But soon Adam and Eve sinned, for they didn't trust God and tried to make themselves—give life to themselves. They wouldn't surrender. It was like they held their breath. They sinned, and death reigned. Yet in the Old Testament, we find people still have spirits given by God. But it's like they won't surrender their spirits until God takes them. It's like they won't truly *expire*, so they can't *inspire*.

You know, love is giving up yourself—
your spirit—
your life to another like a sacrifice.

God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Holy Breath). The Spirit emanates from Father and Son. Do you get the picture? Father and Son breathe the same breath . . . like a kiss . . . constantly surrendering life, breath, Spirit to the other. God is love, and love is passionate, sacrificial surrender.

“In this is love,” writes John, “not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins.” And Jesus gave us His Spirit. In this is love: God breathes into us. Yet we don’t breathe back—love back. We hold our breath; we hold our lives.

Spoiled children do that. It’s a way they seize control. “Well, I’ll just hold my breath!” It’s insane, but we do it. When frightened, we do it. It’s a way we try to gain control . . . but our control is like asthma triggered by fear, and the Father has to hold His child and whisper, “Relax, relax, relax. Breathe out, breathe in.”

Maybe sin is like holding your breath, holding your spirit, holding your life, refusing to surrender, refusing to love, refusing to breathe God. For “God is love.” And John writes, “God is Spirit.” So God is breath.

In the Old Testament, Ezekiel has a vision of Israel as a valley full of dry bones. Ezekiel prophesies, and the bones come together. Then God says, “Son of man, prophesy to the breath saying, ‘Come breath.’” Ezekiel does, and the old bones live.

Well, last month my father looked like a valley of dry bones. Without breath his body wasted away. My hero, my father, who had once been my strength: I could pick him up like a rag doll. I imagine them picking up Jesus on Friday like a rag doll . . .

I noticed something for the first time this week: In all four gospels, Scripture tells us that the very last thing Jesus did on the cross was surrender His breath. We’ve lost sight of that because of our English translations.

- Matthew writes that with a loud voice He “yielded up His pneuma”—Spirit—breath. “Yielded up” is *aphiami*, translated forgive, suffer, let, or yield.
- Mark writes that He breathed His last, “ekpneō”—expired—ex-spirited.
- Luke records Jesus crying, “Father, into your hands I commit my breath”—my Spirit—my pneuma.
- John records Jesus crying, “It is finished,” and then He “gave up His pneuma”—His Spirit—His breath.

Using my computer, I searched the Old Testament and couldn’t find any place where any man is said to “give up his spirit” or “surrender his breath.” The closest thing was Psalm 31:5 where David says he “commits his spirit.” Yet even there he’s a prophetic picture of Christ. And we know David didn’t commit *every* breath to the Lord. He must have held his breath as he seduced Bathsheba and murdered Uriah.

So get the picture: God breathed into Adam, and Adam held his breath . . . until Jesus, whom Scripture calls the ultimate Adam—last Adam . . . until Jesus *ex-spired*: surrendered His breath—His Spirit. And He not only surrendered His breath; He expired for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus was the first to expire and the first to inspire.
That is, “He is the first born of all creation.”

In Romans 8, Paul writes that “all creation is groaning in travail waiting for the revealing of the sons of glory,” all so that “Christ might be the first-born among many brethren.” So then,

this world is like a womb, and Jesus was the first born out of it. So watching the death of Jesus or one of His brethren would be like watching a birth from inside the womb.

It's hard to watch a death;
it's a thrill to watch a birth.

The creation is a womb, and we're still inside it. We're fertilized with eternity (eternal seed), but still exist in space and time.

Martin Luther used to say, "Imagine if a baby could reason inside the womb. Surely it would wonder, 'What are these hands for, feet for? What is this mouth for?'" [Exhibit A]

Imagine twins in the womb debating the existence of another world. If you were one of those twins, your best evidence would be yourself and what was created in you. (The lungs in your chest, like eternity in your heart.) The best evidence would be the very things that seemed superfluous and unnecessary in your present world.

What good are lungs in the womb? There's no air to breathe. The baby gets all its oxygen through the umbilical cord. Yet as early as ten weeks gestation, doctors detect breathing movements. By twenty-eight weeks, the baby will breathe fluid. The baby is not really breathing, because it's not getting oxygen. The baby is *preparing* to breathe.

Now, imagine if you're the skeptical twin. You might say:

Stop that! That's stupid! Stop exercising that empty space in your chest and pay attention to your cord. You get all your nutrients and oxygen through the cord. Life is in the cord. "All you need is cord . . . [bumbadada] all you need is cord [bumbadada] . . . all you need is cord, cord . . . cord is all you need."

If you were the skeptical twin, you might say:

Pay attention to the stock market, the price of gas, your retirement account, this world, life in the real world. And stop talking about faith, hope, and love. Woman, bury that love for your children. They're dead. Suzie Livingstone, bury that hope for a husband. It ain't gonna happen. Dan, your faith in church, family, and God is stupid. Don't endure such longing. Just "curse God and die."

We ask, "Why the painful, unfulfilled longings?" just like a baby would ask, "Why the lungs . . . these empty spaces in my chest? There's nothing to fill them with but fluid."

You know, when a baby is born, it hurts a great deal; not just the momma, but also the baby. Those contractions are brutal. But that groaning travail squeezes the fluid out of the lungs. The pressure is so intense, the baby can no longer breathe fluid. The baby is being prepared to breathe air. The baby is being expired. For in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he will be inspired:

take a tremendous breath of air,
scream,
see with his eyes,
run with his feet,
eat pizza with his mouth,

hug his mom and dad with his hands.

The baby is *home*.

And all that remains of that umbilical cord, all that remains of that which used to seem like everything, all that remains is a belly button.

Everybody, pull up your shirt and gaze at your navel and make a declaration:

You used to be everything to me! You were my life, my breath, my blood, my bread! But I was made for another world. I am no longer bound by you. Navel cord, you are buried in some medical waste bin, and I live! I have been born.

And now by faith, hope, and love in Christ, you can gaze at this world and say:

You used to be everything to me. You were my life, my breath, my blood, and my bread. But I was made for another world. I am no longer bound by you. One day my body will be buried and burned. But I live. I have been born again.

You see, even though we're still in this world, we can receive God's Spirit by faith. And one day we'll breathe it with new bodies in the kingdom of our Father. "What is sown a physical body," Paul says, "is raised a spiritual body." Faith, hope, and love remain. We thought they were superfluous and silly, but they remain. And this old body will be like a dried-up, old, umbilical cord thrown away but leaving behind a glorious spiritual belly button.

I could find only three belly button verses in all of Scripture:

1. Ezekiel prophesies that when God found us, our navel cord was uncut. We were dependent and tethered to this world.
2. Proverbs 3 says literally, "Trust in the Lord, and it will be health to your navel." That is, trust the Lord, and it will be health for your relationship to this world. You'll no longer be sucking the life out of it.
3. In Song of Solomon 7:2, to the bride the Lord says, "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine." I think Jesus finds the belly button of His bride extremely sexy. That place where His people used to depend on this world, which now has been cut and healed, because they depend on Him, that place is filled with blood that's turned to wine. So may you have a healthy navel and breathe the air of God's kingdom, even here by faith.

I once read a silly story about a fish that had been trained to despise water and breathe air. One day by accident, this fish was dropped into a river. For the longest time, the fish held its breath in fear but finally surrendered its empty gills. And instead of dying, it began to *really live*.

I wonder if it's like that when we die: a big fish dropped into the river for which it was made.

Acts 17:28: "In him we live and move and have our being." *In God*. God is love and God is Spirit and God is breath. So maybe even now we're holding our breath. Unless we expire, we can't inspire.

Like I was saying, watching the death of Christ or one of His brethren would be like watching a birth from inside the womb. All we'd see is pain, pressure, loss, a cross, a bag of bones expiring.

Well, Jesus expired, and He causes us to expire: to surrender, to confess, to pick up a cross, to *love*. On Good Friday Jesus surrendered His breath, and on Easter Sunday He appeared to His disciples. John 20:21:

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (the Holy Pneuma—the Holy Breath).

I Corinthians 15:45:

Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (pneuma, breath).

So Jesus expires us on His cross, like a birth canal. Through His cross He expires us and inspires us.

Colossians 1:15:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Whatever is not born through His cross is worthless, nothing, and dead. For His cross is the birth canal from the womb of this world into eternity. So when He rose (when He passed through), all things eternal rose with Him. When Jesus rose, the kingdom of heaven rose with Him. We are now witnessing its birth from inside the womb, this womb of space and time.

Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven or yeast hidden in dough.” Yeast makes bread rise by producing warm carbon dioxide: breath in the dough. (Breath may come from “beorma,” the old English word for yeast.) The eternal kingdom is everywhere rising in space and time, yet it was finished as Christ cried out on the cross.

When Jesus rose, a new creation rose, for Jesus breathed life into all things eternal. Surrender to Him, and your life becomes eternal: every breath, every expiration; every desire, dream, and longing. For every empty place is in fact faith, hope, and love being created by God (like lungs blown into dust). So that having once expired, they might be *inspired* with Himself—uniquely with Himself.

Have you ever noticed each resurrection experience is unique? Doubting Thomas gets to put his hand in Jesus’ side. Coward Peter is reinstated as the Rock. (He must have breathed that in.) Confused disciples on the way to Emmaus get all Scripture explained to them by the Word of God. The last of all, Mary of Magdalene, who had been infected with demons, gets to see Jesus *first*.

You see, He fills you uniquely where you're empty uniquely. He is shaping those places now in this world so that when you breath Him in, you will know Him as no one else knows Him in all creation. Now those empty places feel like a curse. But surrendered, they become eternal blessings, for He fills them with Himself. C. S. Lewis writes:

The mold in which a key is made would be a strange thing, if you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you – you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith.

When you come to the communion table in faith, you participate in Christ's death and resurrection, His expiration and inspiration. He helps you expire in "spirit and truth," that is, "in breath and truth." When breath contains truth, we call it a word. When you come to the table, Christ helps you breath out—expire—words:

- You breathe out "I'm sorry," and you breathe in grace.
- You breathe out "Help me," and you breathe in the Savior.
- You breathe out your unique life (every breath), and you breathe in His unique life for you.
- You breathe out your self, and you breathe in His self: life, breath, blood, and bread.

In this womb of a world, maybe this communion table is like an umbilical cord from heaven. For here we breathe—expire and inspire—until that day we stand before Him and this table becomes the most sexy feature on the bride of Christ: her belly button containing wine at the Marriage Supper of the lamb.

Recently my friend had a vision during worship. (It's in your bulletin.) He saw people come to the table and die—be expired. But Jesus would catch them, breathe on them, and say, "Welcome home." At that moment, each person would realize that their pain, heartache, and tears were all gone and Jesus was wearing them all. So Jesus was in them all. You see, Easter had been waiting in every breath.

Here we expire and inspire.
And Easter is waiting in every breath.

So my dad longed for his family, but he surrendered the longing. Now he is with his family, and he is God's family. And I bet it's like he's breathing them all in.

My dad had this painful longing for church. He wanted to come here one last time before he died. It didn't happen. But at his funeral, people had visions of dad here at church with Jesus. And as everyone partied in his honor, gates opened, and the family of heaven joined in the singing. So his whole family came to church with and for him, one last time. And *wow!* He must've breathed it in.

He loved the mountains and horses. A friend said she saw my dad after he died, as she was walking in the woods on a mountain praying. She looked up and he was riding a beautiful horse, laughing, and smiling as he said, “Lori, have hope.”

Maybe you don’t believe in stuff like visions. But my dad is climbing Mt. Zion and breathing it all in with great lungs of faith, hope, and love.

My friend Suzie yearned for a husband. Years ago I had my last meaningful conversation with her. She could barely speak. We talked on the phone. After a time, she said, “Peter . . . do you . . . think . . . that I, Suzie Livingstone . . . will find a man . . . to marry me?” I froze. She was desperate, but who would want to marry her? Then I remembered, and I said, “Yes, Suzie. You will marry Jesus.”

There was this long silence on the other end of the phone. It turns out that she was taking a deep breath, for the next thing I heard was, “W. . . OW!”

A few years ago, Suzie expired. And now she’s forever *inspired*, filled with the Great Bridegroom. And He must adore his passionate bride, Suzie Livingston. I bet she just breathes Him in.

My friend who watched her children die has experienced incredible pain, but she’s surrendered and confessed it. Satan has told her she’s a “mother of death,” but I’ve been with her as Jesus has shown her He has all her children, for they are His, and He “makes all things new.” Jesus has told her, “You are Eve: Mother of the living.” She may be more fruitful than anyone I know, for even in this world she has breathed Christ into the deepest, darkest places of her soul.

Each of these people loves God uniquely, for it turns out there was Easter in every breath.

It was thirty-two and one-half days ago my father died. The last thing he said to me was, “Thank you,” after I gave him communion. This past week I couldn’t stop thinking about the last thing I said to him. I didn’t know he was going to die in a few minutes, but I knew he was struggling. Everyone else had left the room, and we had a few minutes alone. He could no longer speak. I rested my head on the bed by his chest. He was like a valley of dry bones, and I could hear his old breath crackling and popping as his lungs filled with fluid from pneumonia. I said, “Dad, I want to pray for you.” I prayed something like this:

Father in heaven, it must be really hard and frightening not knowing if you can catch your next breath. Please help my dad to know deep down inside that he no longer needs to breath air because, Father, he can breathe your Spirit. God, help Dad to relax and breathe you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I kissed my dad on the head and said, “I’m going home to get my stuff, and I’ll come back to spend the night.” When I returned, he had just breathed his last . . . and first. My sister said he started to slide as soon as I left. He’d inspire and expire, then stop . . . inspire and expire, then stop longer . . . like he was testing the water, testing the air, testing the atmosphere in another world. He inspired and expired one last time. He expired carbon dioxide and inspired the Spirit of God. *He was home.*

It’s hard to watch a death but a thrill to watch a birth.

We had witnessed my father’s birth from inside the womb. And this week I began to realize my last words to him were prophecy. I’d prophesied (or the Son of man in me had

prophesied) to the valley of dry bones and to the breath of God. And now my dad Dan Hiett breathes God. And every breath is forever Easter.

Last Tuesday night I took a walk down to Turkey Creek. I'd been incredibly depressed and a jerk to my wife. As I walked in the twilight, I began to confess and surrender, asking my Father in heaven to tell my dad that I missed him, that in many ways I felt like a failure. I said, "Father in heaven, I'm sorry, and I feel empty." I wept and wept. I *expired*.

I expired, and then I looked down and saw raccoon prints in the mud. I heard a bunch of frogs croaking in a pond. I smelled spring in the air. And I realized Easter was all around me! I'd just been holding my breath in fear. But having expired, I could inspire, even here by faith.

For on the night He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way after supper, He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Pray with me:

Lord Jesus, I expire. I surrender myself, my life, my breath, my spirit. Forgive me and fill me with yourself. Inspire me, Lord.

We invite you to come to the Lord's table. Expire your sin and self, and inspire the body and blood of Jesus.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. He is risen in every possible way for all eternity. And you are witnessing His resurrection from the womb of this world. So as you leave, may you expire yourself and inspire Him with every breath until that day you stand before Him in glory. In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

-Genesis 2:7

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit [pneuma: breath]. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

-I Corinthians 15:42-49

And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.

-Mark 15:37

And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit [pneuma: breath].

-Matthew 27:50

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit [pneuma: breath]!” And having said this he breathed his last.

-Luke 23:46

When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit [pneuma: breath]. . . . On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit [pneuma: breath].”

-John 19:30, 20:19-22

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

-Psalm 33:6

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

-Colossians 1:15-20

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. . . . We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren.

-Romans 8:22-23, 28-29

If I were a twin in the womb I doubt that I could prove the existence of earth to my mate. He would probably object that the idea of an earth beyond the womb was ridiculous, that the womb was the only earth we'd ever know. If I

tried to explain that earthlings live in a greatly expanded environment and breathe air, he would only be skeptical. After all, a fetus lives in water; who could imagine its being able to live in a universe of air? To him such a transition would seem impossible. It would take birth to prove the earth's existence to a fetus. A little pain, a dark tunnel, a gasp of air—and then the world outside! Green grass, laps, lakes, the ocean, horses (could a fetus imagine a horse?), rainbows, walking, running, surfing, ice-skating. With enough room that you don't have to shove, and a universe beyond.

-Joe Bayly, The Last Thing We Talk About

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor swathed with bands.

-Ezekiel 16:4

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel . . .

-Proverbs 3:5-8a

Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.

-Song of Solomon 7:2

He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

-Matthew 13:33

One last, first point about the *zymē*, the leaven itself. How does yeast lighten dough? By filling it with thousands of tiny pockets of carbon dioxide. And how do those pockets of gas cause bread to rise? By expanding when heated. Behold, therefore, the way the imagery of the Leaven reflects and refracts Scripture's other references to warm carbon dioxide: that is to *breath*, both human and divine. The whole kingdom of God – the catholic, actual mystery that, come fair response or foul, is irremovably mixed into creation – operates by *warm breath*. It takes its origin from a Father's breathed-forth *Word* who spoken once for all eternity brings the world out of nothing into being. It marches through its history under the guidance of a *Spirit* – a *rauch*, a *pneuma*, a wind, a breath – who, proceeding from the Father's speaking of the Word, confirms that Word with signs following. And the imagery grows more and more complex. Jesus breathes out the Spirit upon his disciples after his resurrection. After he has ascended, he sends that same Spirit upon the church as a rushing mighty wind. And finally, when the church goes forth to announce the leavening of the world by all this Trinitarian heavy breathing, it is by yet more warm breath – even by hot air – that the proclamation is made: "For after . . . the world by wisdom knew not God, it please God *by the foolishness of preaching* to save them that believe" (KJV, emphasis mine).

-Robert Capon, Kingdom, Grace, Judgment

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

-Revelation 21:5

For at that time he showed our frailty and our fallings, our discouragements, our abasements, our humiliations and our outcastings; all the woe which it seemed to me could possibly befall us in this life. And with this he showed his blessed power, his blessed wisdom, his blessed love, in which he protects us at such times as tenderly and as sweetly for his own glory and as safely for our salvation as he does when we enjoy most pleasure and comfort; and with this he raises us in spirit right up to heaven, and turns everything to his glory and our joy everlastingly; for his love never allows our time to be lost.

-Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

The mold in which a key is made would be a strange thing, if you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you – you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith.

-C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

Tonight He showed me a picture. The front of the church, between the stage and the front row, turned into a pit of fire. Then I saw Peter on the stage, and a pair of huge hands appeared behind him and pushed him towards the fire. Then the hands moved out into the crowd and started pushing them all towards the fire as well. Each person would walk to the edge of the fire, take some bread, dip it in the wine, and eat it and then kneel at the edge and an angel would cut off their head. Their body would fall into the fire, and the same hands would catch them in the midst of the fire. He (Jesus) would then breath on the broken body and make them whole again and look straight into their eyes and say, "Welcome home." At that moment each person would realize that their pain, their heartache, their tears were all gone and Jesus was wearing them all.

-Dale Eben, February 14 in worship at LMCC

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, thou knowest." Again he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

-Ezekiel 37:1-9

Oh our Loving Father, help us remember that it is not where we breathe, but where we love, that we live.

-Soren Kierkegaard

"In Him we live and move and have our being."

-Acts 17:28

He who loves is born of God and knows God. . . . God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

-I John 4:7b-8, 16b