

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I woke up on the second day of this new year with silver light streaming through my window. I folded back the mounds of blankets that had kept me warm through the night and tried to get my bearings in this new day. Pulling back the curtains, I peered out at the sound. The green marshlands that bordered it teemed with life. Through the other window was the beach at low tide and an angry sea whipped up by the wind. It was so cold and the wind so fierce that even the birds would not venture out for long this day. I was surrounded by water and the wailing song of the wind.

The Spirit of God moved over the waters and brought life into being. With such a strong voice that even shakes the house what are you saying to me today, God? What do you want to breathe into life within me as your child? I am trying to attune myself more to hear your voice. There is much that I think I miss – words of comfort, words to remind me that I am yours, that I am your beloved, that your love for me will never fail.

I also miss your words of instruction: Call so and so and see how they are doing. Write that struggling person a note of encouragement. Get to bed before your eyes roll back in your head, Jennifer. Ask forgiveness for being so short with that person. Today the word is to sleep and eat and curl up with a book and know that you are near. 30 degrees and gale force winds are not suitable conditions for a bike ride even if this beach does have wonderful bike lanes.

The wind shakes the house. I become more and more conscious of my own breath, the wind enervating me. The rising and falling of my chest. The warmth of my own breath on my cheek as it is caught by the blanket pulled up around my ears. When we have centering prayer here on Thursdays,

Peggy Ruopp leads us through a relaxation exercise to focus us in our time with God. It is a breathing exercise that opens us to God's presence. As we breathe in and breathe out, we feel the love of God breathing us, filling us mind, body and spirit. Our earthly house absorbs the force of this wind and is filled with a love that knows us better than we even know ourselves. We are embraced by our Lord who loves us and claims us as his very own.

It's a curious thing how God's Spirit moves in us and breathes us. I often wonder if we are musical instruments in the hands of the Almighty. His spirit blows through us warm and wet and then from us issues forth sound, the melody of our lives. It is the sound of triumph at hard-earned success and the unheeded Joy of a toddler on wobbly legs off on a new adventure. It is the contagious laughter of friends and the language of love. It can be the rhythm of hammers and saws as a Habitat house will be built by our church in the next couple of months. It can be the duet of a Stephen minister with their care receiver as they pray and share life's struggles together. It is the sweet song of growing faith and new relationships that will form in our ChristCare groups. It is the Spirit breathing through us as we fill out Time & Talent forms and feel the spirit nudging us to live and give ourselves to join in the song.

The Spirit sings and gives voice to the goodness that God brings forth in and through all of us. Our empty vessels are filled with sound and through us God seeks to fill the whole earth with his glory and justice. The kingdom will come into being with a symphony of sound & the voice of the Lord will fill the heavens and the earth.

However the melody can also be tinged with heartache and sorrow. We buried Jack on Thursday. 59 is too young to die if you ask me.

15 months of fiercely battling cancer is too long a time period as well. I don't know how to rectify the two.

On Wednesday I said goodbye to a former co-worker and a friend. Kimberly was too young as well. I had hoped she had more melody to play with her life, more sprightly tunes in purples and oranges with surprise descants and unusual turns that only Kimberly could dream up, but it wasn't to be. The respirator attempted to breathe for her but in the end the love of God that had breathed her into being and was with her all her life was ready to carry her on to a new place, a new life beyond death.

I have stood over to many hospital beds & sat across from someone in my office too many times and have not been able to answer the question, "Why is this happening?" Almost always I have to answer that I don't know. Why is there suffering and pain? Why do people die too soon? Why do we get hurt? Why does God allow it? How can God bring good from this as horrible as it is?

You know I ask the same questions they do, God. I struggle with it. I wish I had more answers. I like Jacob, our forefather, wrestle with you on the ground all night long refusing to let go until you speak to me your name, explain yourself and bless me. Maybe I just want to feel your hot breath against my face to know that you are that real, to know that you are that near to me. What would be better but to exhaust myself, to spend all my energy and then collapse into the arms of the almighty. What's the good of this? Exhaustion, yes. Answers to my many questions, no.

But I walk away from the encounter different though.

There are only a few things I know for sure.

I know that the God who holds me and with whom I wrestle is real.

God is truly there. And in the end all there is is love.

The God who loves me and calls me his child will hold me forever.

Even when my life is a bruised reed he will not break me in two.

Even if my light is but dimly burning God will not let it go out.  
The spirit of God breathes in me and fills me with his love.  
Even if everything else fails and all that is good falls away  
from me his love will remain. I am a child of God.  
Jesus has chosen me. I feel the love of God breathing me.

My last day at the beach it is a balmy 40 and the winds have subsided.  
We sink into the sand as we head down to the water's edge.  
The wind blows through my hair and fills my lungs with cold air.  
I breathe in the salt spray and listen to the crash of the waves  
and the bubbling foam. The gulls fly overhead against a backdrop  
of brilliant blue. All seems right with the world. And I reflect  
on the constants of my life.

My life will always be bordered by baptismal waters. God is forever  
there as constant as the waves and the rising and falling of the tides.  
The love of Jesus is boundless like this ocean. I could be swept up  
in its current and float away in it forever. And the wet sand  
beneath my feet reminds me of your promises to me and Abraham  
& all who call upon your name. We are your beloved, your chosen.  
Your blessings to us are so numerous we can't even begin to count  
them. They stream through my fingers and are carried  
on the wind. I'll still be finding that sand in my shoes  
and in my clothing as a reminder of that  
for days and days to come.

And my companions on this journey, it is good to be with them.  
They remind me of you as well. We sing and dance this part  
of the journey and I hear your voice echo in their words.  
I get to walk with them for awhile and delight in how our songs  
weave together into one until their song on earth is complete  
and you breathe them into the new life beyond death.

Lord Jesus, attune me heart, mind, and soul to listen to your voice.  
Make me an instrument in the hands of the Almighty.

Breathe your Spirit through me wet and warm that I may sing  
your song and my life be filled with your praise.  
I am yours without a doubt. Your love will never let me go.