

“Staggered Breathing”

Rev. Nathan Detering

December 10, 2017

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft. (and ears open to beautiful music)

Because this is what we are about:

We know there is no answer but to love one another.

We bear witness against unnecessary destruction.

We gather in community to practice being the person

The world is calling us to be.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something, and that something is not nothing.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything

That is how the light gets in.”

Two weeks ago an email pings into my inbox;

It's from Sarah, our Music Magician.

“Here's the order of music we want to do on the 10th,” she says....

‘we can take a break there and there...but it's not easy for us to get up

And down the risers...so not there, or there...

And you can fit your sermonette somewhere in there (my word, not hers),

Before we move toward the big finish....

And about your sermon...have you heard, says Sarah, of the concept

Of ‘Staggered Breathing?’

*It sounds like something you do after too long of a night at the pub,
But choirs use it to refer to group breathing for long singing phrases –
Everyone breathes in a different spot so it sounds like no one is breathing.
Pretty cool, right congregation?*

I mean, have you heard them breathe yet?

So let me get right to the point, because that's what sermonettes do,
And because more music is waiting, and today, especially today,
Music is our teacher.

And this is my point:

It feels like we're all living in times that are singing in such loud,
Long, cacophonous phrases....and in these loud, long, never-ending
Cycle of singing which isn't singing but more like yelling...

I can't seem to catch a breath, I can't seem to get any oxygen,
And my face is red, and it feels like I'm about to faint even...

Here's what it sounds like, tell me if you recognize:

Morning buzz of smart phone tells us its time to wake...Deep Breath...

And headlines appear on the screen, eyes not even yet fully open...

And feet not yet on floor....

And oh God...that tweets have already begun,

*and oh my God, he's resigning today for sexual indiscretion, and him, and
him...*

*all these men who, at least on the screen or over the radio,
seemed worthy of trust,*

and LA is on fire....

- Take a shallow breath –

But its Christmas, Peace on Earth flags waving in the snow,

Hanukah beginning Tuesday, so much light, so much good, ok?

Cheer up! Holiday parties! Egg nog (even though it's gross)!

Presents! Gifts! Malls! Traffic!

Cheer up! Life is what happens when you're feeling moody and making plans!

Look outside! Snow! Church not cancelled!

- Shallow breath –

Dad, who's this Roy Moore guy? He's gonna be a Senator but he was banned from the mall for watching girls?

Jerusalem, capital of Israel? But aren't Muslims there, too?

And Christians?

More tweets – God, people, put down your phones

- Shallow breath –

Turn off NPR! Turn dial to 104, your 24hr Christmas station!

No breaths! Only a few commercials!

Perry Como; Charlie Brown jazz, Bob Dillon Christmas Album!

Get out the ugly sweaters! Put antlers on your car! Put the red noze

On the front hood! Of course you look an idiot!

That point is, relax, lighten up, let go...

- Shallow breath –

Another year on the horizon! 2018! Can you believe it!

Sure it's feels like apocalypse! Sure, as our reading says,

Rats seem like they have the run of the place and cats are on the prowl.

But the light and love shine and twinkle, even when you feel like

That strand of lights on the tree that you have to slap to keep from

Blinking off,

Because scripture says the lion will lay with the lam, and the cats and the rats will rejoice together....

Or in other words, keep trying, - shallow breath –

Keep going, keep hoping....

Or at least, that's what the long, loud phrase sounds like in my ears.

You too?

And when we try to get listen and love in this world by ourselves,

No wonder that we get all blue in the face,

The oxygen in our lungs all expired, our diaphragms rigid and frozen,

Our voices and our spirits gasping....

Which is why today our choir's staggered breathing can't come soon enough.

Because, you see, they are showing us how to take turns,

They are showing us we need the person next us to hold the note

While we get some air,

They are teaching us, they are reminding us how much we need each other

To keep on singing in this loud, discordant, yelling, rambunctious,

cacophonous choir that is this year, this moment, this now....

So hear me, this is not a performance today, ok?

This is not a passive experience of where the experts, the professionals get

To sing and place so that we all get to listen and then

Go back home all private and quiet and alone.

No, instead this today is a religious training ground,

It's breathing boot camp for how we can lean on and learn from and reluy

On each other to sing together this one long phrase of life

In which we need all the help, holiness, presence, breath, and music

That we can get...

Choir, Sarah, musicians...thank you for helping the rest of sing and live...