

“Sigh No More”



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September 8, 2024 | 16th Sunday after Pentecost

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God, Amen.

- In our Gospel today: How Jesus “sighed”
 - Is that a positive emotion, or a negative one?
 - On the face of it, a sigh is a heavy exhale, right? Maybe also with a drop of the shoulders
 - But you can sigh for so many reasons.
 - Let’s all sigh together now
 - Of course, before you can sigh, you need to take a deep breath.
 - So let’s lift up our shoulders as we breathe in deeply...
 - When you sigh, feel free to make the sighing sound. “Ahhh”
 - And now drop them as we breathe out. And let it all out.
 - Did you hear your sighing sound? If it was higher-pitched you may have sighed with relief. If it was lower-pitched you may have sighed with frustration.
 - I wonder which kind of sigh Jesus sighed?
 - Sometimes we discover after sighing that we’ve been holding our breath without realizing it.

- Mumford & Sons has a song called “Sigh No More”. It’s the song they named that album after
 - It’s a quote of a Shakespeare poem with that same title
 - “Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go”
 - This is a negative sigh, isn’t it?
 - Urging us to stop allowing the flaws of the people around us to get us down.
 - Don’t be discouraged. Enjoy your life. Let them go!
- So what was Jesus thinking when he sighed?
- Looking closer at the humanity of Jesus
 - Jesus walked
 - Jesus wept
 - Jesus “sighed”

- It makes me think of my friend Connor, who coaches rock-climbing and uses an acronym in his coaching: B.R.A.V.E.
- B.R.A.V.E. (Thanks to Connor Link)
 - Breathe – “With each inhale we are exploring the vastness of possibility”
 - Release – Sighing: “What stories are you currently telling yourself? Are they true?” Maybe in our sighing we need to release one (or all) of those stories, and find some new ones. Remember, we aren’t releasing ourselves from who we are or how we’re feeling. We’re releasing *into* who we are and how we’re feeling.”
 - Allow – This is an invitation to dream, to notice the enormity of God’s love for us and the the vastness of possibilities of life when we allow for it. God has infinite resources, so often just waiting for us until we ask.
 - Visualize – Shift from vastness to specificity. From “all things are possible” to “*this* is possible.” What in your life seems impossible that you need to be possible?

- Express – There is fear in this step. But it's not fear of real danger, it's fear of the stories we've been telling ourselves. Or maybe even the fear of letting go of the stories that used to define us and bring us comfort. But if we've Breathed, and Released, and Allowed and Visualized, then we're ready to move forward with curiosity and trust, and without fear.
- Let's sigh again, shall we? But with our eyes closed. Deep breath in, shoulders up. Deep breath out, shoulders relaxed. One more time, this time with our eyes open.
 - Does the world look a little different after a deep sigh?
 - Maybe it did for Jesus, too.
- Regardless of whether Jesus' sighing was positive or negative...
 - I think it's an important stage in our lives
 - We try to imagine that we can do all the steps at once in life
 - But we're not created that way
- To paraphrase a famous passage in Ecclesiastes,
 - There is a time to Inhale. There's a time to Sigh. And there's a time to Allow, Visualize and Express as well.
 - And these times don't need to overlap.

- If you're sighing in life right now, then this is your time for sighing. Don't skip over it.
- Think how it felt to breathe deeply, in and out.
- Next may come the time to Allow, and so on, until you have Expressed what you need to Express. To Accomplish what you needed to Accomplish.
- Granted, there's a lot to sigh about in the world
 - When you heard the reading from James this morning, did it remind you of the world you observe?
 - Do you see wealthy people getting treated favorably, and the under-resourced getting the short end of everything?
 - Let's sigh together again. [sigh]. It's not right. We should love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. Because Faith without Works is dead.
 - When we're finished sighing, there will be time for those Works.
- But woops. When we get to the Gospel reading, in the first part (before Jesus' sighing) we see him treating an outsider... like an outsider! Not how we imagine Jesus at all.

- A Gentile woman asks for a demon to be cast out of her daughter
- And Jesus essentially declares her “ineligible”
- Many books have been written on this one scene
- So we’re not going to solve it right now. Maybe he was testing her faith. Maybe Jesus was learning himself, and needed to hear something extraordinary like this to understand his own calling better.
- It’s ambiguous! The Gospel should be clear, not murky. It’s so frustrating!
- Let’s sigh together one more time.
 - It’s true: “Sigh *No* More” is the title of Shakespeare’s poem, Mumford & Sons’ song, and this sermon.
 - But maybe we should be pointing the other direction. “Sigh more!”
 - Whether it’s sadness or frustration or relief or wonder...
 - If it means we’re taking a moment to center ourselves... to breathe in deeply and sigh the breath out... relaxing our shoulders and taking a new look at the world...

- Then we should do it more, not less!
- We should not end the sighing, we should redeem it.
- And I actually think this is what Mumford does in his lyrics at the end of the song.
 - Whereas Shakespeare was urging his hearers to let go of love. To forget about it and try to enjoy life anyway
 - Mumford sees Love as the key. And so do I.
 - And so does Jesus. Whether he understood Love from day one, or needed teachers like the Syrophenician woman to fully grasp it. In the end, Jesus shows us the meaning of Perfect Love.
 - And Love doesn't tell us to Sigh No More. Love redeems our sighs.
 - Listen to Mumford's words at the climax of the song:
 - "Love, it will not betray you, dismay or enslave you, it will set you free to be more like the man you were made to be
There is a design, an alignment, a cry of my heart to see the beauty of love as it was made to be.
- Amen

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday closest to September 7



Proper 18
Year B
RCL

<i>Track 1</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>Track 2</i>
Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23		Isaiah 35:4-7a
Psalms 125		Psalms 146
James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17		James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17
Mark 7:24-37		Mark 7:24-37

The Collect

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favour is better than silver or gold.

The rich and the poor have this in common:
the LORD is the maker of them all.

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity,
and the rod of anger will fail.

Those who are generous are blessed,
for they share their bread with the poor.

Do not rob the poor because they are poor,
or crush the afflicted at the gate;
for the LORD pleads their cause
and despoils of life those who despoil them.

The Psalm

Psalm 125

Qui confidunt

- 1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, *
which cannot be moved, but stands fast for ever.
- 2 The hills stand about Jerusalem; *
so does the LORD stand round about his people,
from this time forth for evermore.
- 3 The scepter of the wicked shall not hold sway over the land allotted to
the just, *
so that the just shall not put their hands to evil.
- 4 Show your goodness, O LORD, to those who are good *
and to those who are true of heart.
- 5 As for those who turn aside to crooked ways,
the LORD will lead them away with the evildoers; *
but peace be upon Israel.

The Epistle

James 2:1-10, [11-13], 14-17

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.[For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.]

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

The Gospel

Mark 7:24-37

Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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