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“Deep Breath”

Matthew 11:25-30

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At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:25-30

When Denisse left her award-winning photography career in the city and moved to Arizona, she was hoping her life would be fuller. Something was calling to her to change. She got married, moved to the quiet suburbs across the country and started a family. But the change came with a lot of grief.

She realized her only friends were in her field of work, so when she wasn't there, doing photography anymore, their friendship ended. She didn't know how to talk to her new neighbors because she only knew how to have career-focused conversations. And when she had a baby, her identity felt even more lost, like she was grasping to remember who she was, but she was drowning.

Even after moving into a life that afforded her more space, having a baby overwhelmed her.

The constant burden of being responsible for a life other than your own is exhausting. Thinking all the way

through the day, planning diapers and meals and naps, in addition to one's own, is too much some days. And comparing yourself to the parents out there on preschool waitlists before their child is even born, can make it feel like you're failing at being a parent.

Dennise says that what has saved her is letting go. She's finding pieces of herself and allowing that to be good. She's had to let go of the comparisons and the expectations. Instead, she allows life to be, and she's finding herself along the way. She says, "Even when we don't have the strength to grip tightly the idea of who we are as a whole, we can hold on to the parts that mean the most to us at that moment. Give those pieces refuge, love, and care. And then we can freely let go when we need to, trusting that the next day, year, or decade will introduce us to different versions of ourselves. Because if there is anything that motherhood has taught me about who I am, it's that I don't know, and that's okay."

But honestly, we all want to be the mom who works out and showers before her kids get up in the morning, then makes it to work on time, comes home and cooks a full dinner. Whether it's in our careers, as parents, or as a partner, the appearances we try to keep up aren't moving us any closer to wholeness. Whatever expectation we are chasing, we are working so hard at it that we're making ourselves drown. We don't want to drown. We want to prove ourselves. We want to live a full, good life. But we can't until we give into the flow, rest and float.

As he is moving through Galilee, Jesus tells the crowds to let go and rest.

"Generation after generation doesn't get it," he

complains to them. He's talking about John the Baptist, and he's hard on the cities where the miracles are happening. "You refuse to see them. You explain them away or allow yourself to get swept up in the day-to-day, too distracted and worried to have time to be changed. You're missing the good stuff."

Jesus keeps ranting, frustrated that God's goodness is getting lost in their busyness. "But you know who does get it?" he asks them. "Kids. The ones who haven't had enough time to be corrupted by your messed up rules. They're still changed by what they experience. They believe girls can run and play just like boys until someone tells them otherwise. They believe it's actually possible for them to be whatever they dream of being. Until teachers tell them they're doing it wrong, they color however they want. They sing and dance because it's joy, not performance. And most of all, they have no choice but to believe they are loved before they do anything at all. They know everyone else is loved too. They're not naïve. They're close to God. The kingdom is joy and perfect belonging.

"So while you're out there fighting over who gets to sit in the privileged seat or sign the laws or be recognized for their nobility, God is revealing God's self to the smallest among you. They see God because they're present for God. They're not caught up in all the push and pull. They're just being. And there's joy and relief in the being."

Then Jesus prays. It kinda sounds passive aggressive when he says, "Thank you, God, that children understand your ways, but it hides in plain sight from the smart, powerful people."

It's hard to just be in a culture that loves collecting and

consuming and spending. Even when we try to take a rest, our self-care is measured.

And you know that's true because "What did you do on your day off?" sometimes feels like a competition. We've internalized the lie that we earn our worthiness so much that when we fail to take a bath or go on a run or volunteer at the food pantry or finish the book sitting by our bed on our day off, we feel gross. We feel lethargic, complacent. We feel guilty about sitting on the couch all day and just being. So our restful days end up being punishing. We're not even good enough to do those.

"Come to me," Jesus tells them. "You're trying too hard. Give yourself a break. You're too hard on yourself. Give yourself a break. You're carrying too much. Give yourself a break."

Actually, when we let go, when we stop trying to win the employee-of-the-month award or the parent-of-the-year award, when we stop trying to fit into the boxes we've been told makes us good, and we just do what works for us, then we find the rhythms that fill us with gratitude and compel us toward forgiveness. Without all of that, we get to live lightly and freely. Instead of holding on so tight—to our appearances or expectations—we recover our lives.

Jesus is calling back to God's promise to the exiles and Moses in Exodus. "I will be with you and will give you rest," God tells them as they begin their 40 years in the wilderness. God's promise is not one of perfection or paradise. It's rest and wholeness because they are God's.

In Genesis, God creates human beings, breathes life into their lungs, and when they take their first

breath—something that’s so involuntary—God calls them good. We are good. We are enough.

We’re tired because we’re addicted to efficiency and consumerism. We believe there’s not enough, so we have to work like hell to make sure we get ours.

So when Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens,” it feels like a deep breath. It feels like everything our souls are waiting for. We want to let go.

We want to let go of working that hard to prove our worth. We want to let go of the expectations that have grown deep roots in our brains from so long ago. We want to let go of what everyone thinks it means to be Christian or mother or employee and reclaim it in a new way.

Who we are is enough, good even. What we have is enough. When we give ourselves permission to be, then the rest of it can be too.

We can live from the deep peace of knowing nothing matters more than God’s love in our lives. Not the doing or making or finishing. Not the feedback your boss gives you or the desperate desire to make your mom proud. Not who your kids are. Not where you live and definitely not what you do. Not even how you spend your free time.

Unforced rhythms of grace come to us when we slow down long enough to turn toward them. Plan less in your day. Look up instead of down when you walk. Then notice the miracle of walking or reading or tying your shoes or sharing breakfast with your child or making the same train transfer as everyone you’re riding with or how puddles are mirrors and the coffee is especially good today.

Jesus says, “my burden is light. Get away with me and

you'll recover your life." God is not the one giving us only what we can handle. Suffering doesn't come from God. Instead, we know from creation that God is a life-giver. Only the life-giving stuff comes from God.

What do you need to recover your life? What do you need to feel whole? Is it the permission and safety to be who you are? Refuge from abuse? Solace from endless breaking news? A change of job? Forgiveness? Whatever feels like freedom, whatever makes you more you, that's God.

Freedom for Mary Oliver felt like escaping to the woods. As a child, she was sexually abused and tortured by nightmares. The woods around her home were more of a home for her. It's where she was safe and where she experienced wonder. She started writing poetry when she was 14, putting words to the lessons she was learning from animals and plants and wind.

In her famous poem, "Wild Geese," she says,

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,

are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

We get to move through our lives from our place of enoughness, full because we are loved. And that changes things. Our interactions become infused with love, and we want to be healed. We believe there is more waiting for us, so we show up with open hearts. And Jesus is the deep breath that locates us in our bodies and relaxes our whole nervous system. Jesus is the permission to be full in a world that tells us to be more. Jesus is freedom for our souls.

So breathe in deep your identity as child of God, and let it change you. You are enough. Breathe in deep and let the love of God fill every corner of your being. You are loved. Breathe in deep and find rest for your soul.

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