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One Breath At A Time

"My refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust." Psalm 91:2

Friends,

Did you wonder where the Letters of Hope had gone, these last couple of weeks? With me coming back to work full-time it got a bit confusing around who would write them... and then there were some questions as to whether the time had come to end this little ministry of our church. Had they run their course? Were they needed any more?

Oh my! The answer was a resounding, "Yes!" Not only did the message come back loud and clear that the letters are appreciated and needed, we now have some new folks who have stepped forward and offered to write a letter every now and then. And if YOU, reading this, have a story, poem, song or image to contribute to help strengthen the community, then please let me know. Many voices keep us strong!

By the time you are reading this, I will be 3 days into a silent meditation retreat. It is a bit unusual in that I will be doing it at home, rather than at a retreat center. It might not be quite as smooth – or quite as silent! – as I am used to. But, then again, nothing is like what we are used to any more.

You might wonder why I do this. Why does our minister go off regularly to sit on a mat for hours on end and meditate? It doesn't seem very Protestant, does it? To some, it might not even seem Christian. Did Jesus meditate?

Let me reassure you! Meditation is far older than Jesus, and he almost certainly knew the tradition. None of us really knows what went on in his mind when he withdrew from the busyness of his ministry to be alone with God. Perhaps some of it was mindfulness.

This is a *practice* – something you *do* - not a religion – something you *believe in*. It is like hockey or piano playing. Over and over again you train your mind and your awareness to be awake. To be in the present moment.

So often we spend our mental energy in the past, remembering or regretting things. Or in the future, planning or hoping for things. Our emotions also look back in time – regret or guilt. And forward in time – anxiety, fear.

Sitting mindfully in the present moment breaks those ties, and allows you to be at peace with whatever is going on in the present moment. Starting with the breath.

If you want to join me, you could try three mindful breaths. For the first, breathe in and out normally, and simply notice, "I am breathing in. I am breathing out." For the second, make your breath a little longer, and notice, "I am breathing in a long breath. I am breathing out a long breath." Of course, on the third, try a short breath.

You will be surprised at how hard that is. Very quickly your mind will jump in with commentary: this is weird! Or judgement: this is dumb. Or emotions: I feel anxious about doing this right. Or your physical body might present sounds, smells or suffering of some kind.

Gently, kindly and compassionately bringing your attention back to the breath helps us learn how to be gentle, kind and compassionate in all the rest of our lives. There are very few ways that I know to practice those essential qualities. I need them! The world needs them! Why not practice them with me?

Grace to you and peace,

Kate

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*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*

