

Staying Grounded in the Midst of a Pandemic

Will you take a moment to yourself?

Note: All bodies are different. Please feel free to adapt this to suit your particular needs.

If you are able and in a safe space to do so, right now, I invite you to take a slow, deep breath in and to release it slowly. And you are invited to do that again...

And again
And again...

Is there any part of your body that you can feel right now? Start with your feet. Can you feel your toes? What if you wiggle them a little? Can you feel the arches of your feet? Your heels? How your feet are connected to your ankles? I invite you to keep breathing slowly and plant your feet on the ground. Can you feel how gravity is still here, waiting to support you?

What else can you feel?

The backs of your legs on your seat? Your hips in contact with a chair? Your arms making contact with your torso? Your lungs pushing your ribs to move? What about your shoulders? I invite you to keep breathing slowly and let your shoulders release down and away from your ears.

Can you feel your head?

I invite you to keep breathing slowly and deeply and allow your tongue to relax in the back of your throat, let your jaw hang a little looser, let your eyes relax in the backs of their sockets. I invite you to close them, keep breathing slowly, and come back later...

Welcome back.

This is your body. It is beautiful, whole, connected, and real. Your cells, fluids, organs, and living tissue are monitoring, adapting, and adjusting each second of each day in order to keep you alive and at optimal health without anyone asking them or telling them to do so. I invite you to notice a few ways in which your whole body is connected right now...they could be small, or large. Maybe you even list them out, write them down, talk about it with a buddy....

Here is one of mine:

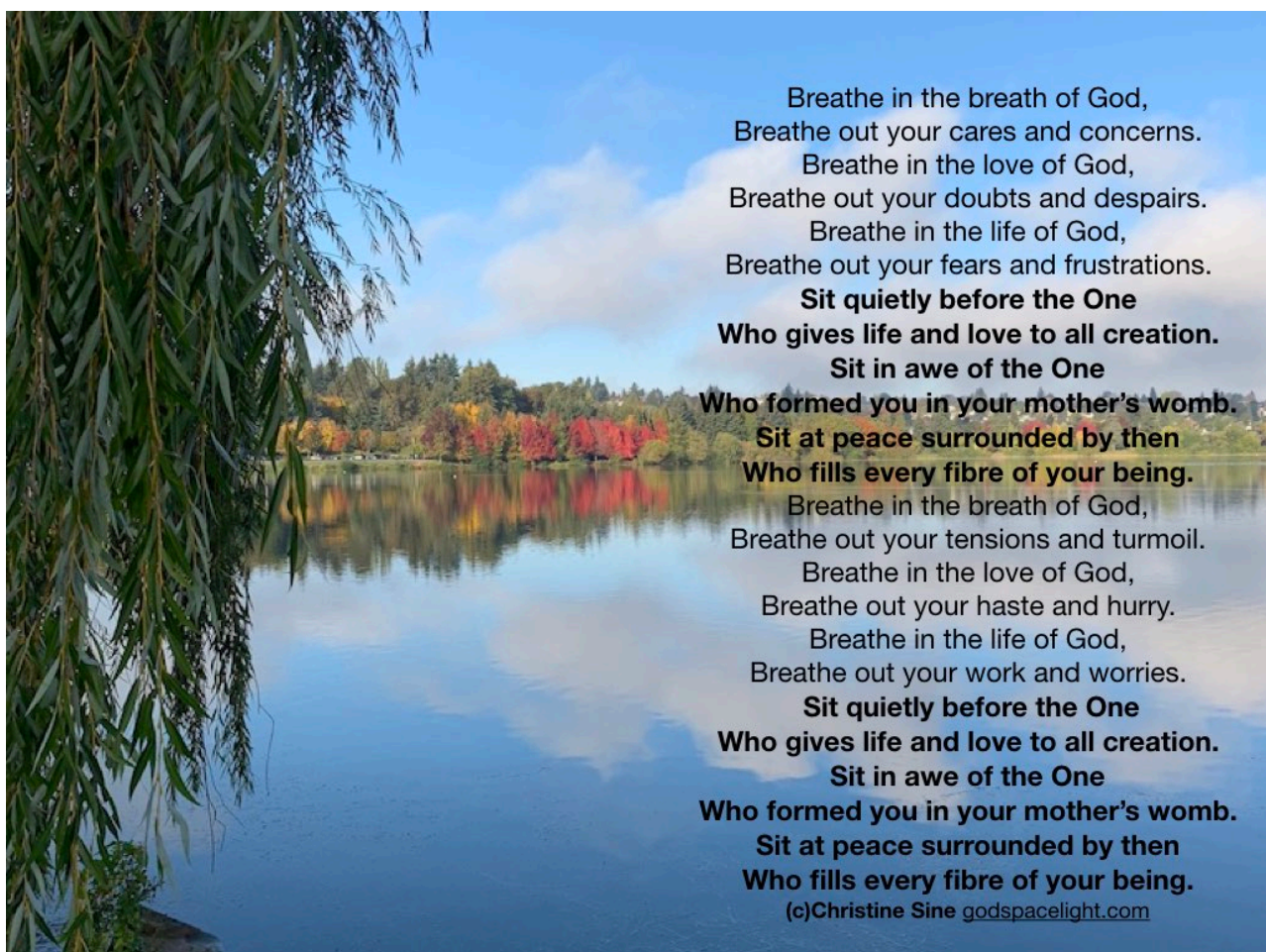
As I am typing, I feel my fingertips shifting quickly on the keyboard. I notice that my fingers are moving which is then causing my wrists to move and I can even feel how my elbows shift very subtly in order to type the words I desire. If I pay attention further up my arm, I can even feel movement at my shoulder and chest. Then I start to notice that it is easier to move on my right side than my left.

This is embodied knowledge. This is somatic awareness.

Although it may sometimes not seem true, and can sometimes feel uncomfortable to acknowledge, you have direct access to this at all times.

Being connected to my own body in this way allows me to recognize that some parts of me do not function as ideally as others. My injured right hip needs more care, compassion, and new ways of doing things than my left hip. So for instance, I find myself putting more weight on the inside of the left sole of my foot and on the outside of the right sole of my foot when I walk. I have had to change the way I walk in order to adapt to the part of me that is not well. My whole body has organically adapted because my right hip is not in optimal shape. What if right now in this time, we choose to remember that we as humans, on this planet earth, in the milky way, in the swirling infinite cosmos, inside the multiverse, we are like parts of a body who are all unmistakably and organically interconnected? Perhaps the cosmos is one whole body of which our planet is an essential part. If this is so, perhaps now is the time to adapt and accommodate for the part that is sick.

If you're like me and many folks with whom I've been communicating recently, you might feel an underlying sense of anxiety, fear, or maybe even panic as we learn more about the fast-spreading and potentially fatal coronavirus. It's OK to feel however you feel right now. Feelings are real and valid AND they pass. We have never lived through something like this before. To me, it feels like we are standing on the edge of a deep canyon and we know we must journey to the bottom of it, but we are sitting in the unknown of what is to come. I invite you to take a deep slow breath in and release it slowly. I invite you to feel your feelings fully, especially the hard ones. I invite you to take care of yourself.



Breathe in the breath of God,
Breathe out your cares and concerns.
Breathe in the love of God,
Breathe out your doubts and despairs.
Breathe in the life of God,
Breathe out your fears and frustrations.
**Sit quietly before the One
Who gives life and love to all creation.
Sit in awe of the One
Who formed you in your mother's womb.
Sit at peace surrounded by then
Who fills every fibre of your being.**
Breathe in the breath of God,
Breathe out your tensions and turmoil.
Breathe in the love of God,
Breathe out your haste and hurry.
Breathe in the life of God,
Breathe out your work and worries.
**Sit quietly before the One
Who gives life and love to all creation.
Sit in awe of the One
Who formed you in your mother's womb.
Sit at peace surrounded by then
Who fills every fibre of your being.**

(c)Christine Sine godspacelight.com

Yesterday was the third Sunday of Lent and for most of us this season has not turned to how we expected. COVID-19 has upended all of our plans for church, quiet gatherings with friends and retreat days away.

At a time like this it is easy to focus on our fears and what makes us anxious and vulnerable during an epidemic. Some of us are closer to the hot spots than others. Tom and I live in Seattle which seems to be the epicenter of the outbreak here in the U.S. at this point and I know how easily we can get consumed by the daily counts and inadequacy of testing. However it seems to me that it is not just the our testing that is inadequate. Our commitment to our self-care and the care of our families and communities is inadequate too and that contributes to our fears and anxieties.

Over the last week I have found myself asking three questions that I think all of us need to engage in at this season.

- What Are You Doing for Self Care?
- What Are You Doing for Family Care?
- What Are You Doing for Care of Others?

I had planned to write a single post about this but I realize there is so much I want to say that I decided 3 posts were needed – so this is the first and the others will follow on Wednesday and Thursday as we already have a post scheduled for Tuesday.

What Are You Doing For Self Care?

It is so easy for us to focus on the negative during a time like this but looking after ourselves means taking a good chunk of time to focus on the positive.

1. **Begin the day with gratitude.** – In the midst of this challenging time we all have much to be grateful for. Some my gratitudes are for the blessings I mention below but as well as that I am grateful for a strong immune system, for good health that will hopefully protect us from the virus, and for a flexible lifestyle and for the resilience God has given us to adapt. I grateful for a strong faith and deep trust in God. What springs to your mind today that you are grateful for?
2. **Count your blessings every day.** Tom and I frequently remind ourselves that we are probably amongst the top 1% when it comes to financial stability. As well as that we have a warm and comfortable home in a beautiful part of the world with spring flowers bursting out around us. We have friends and family who love us, a strong community here in the house and so much else to not just be grateful for but to recognize as blessings from God.
3. **Surround yourself with “at home” items.** What are the items that make you feel safe and secure? This is particularly important where our souls are concerned. Do you have a favourite place in the house, an armchair a few sacred items that make you feel comfortable and safe? Return to these as often as possible. A sacred item like a small cross that you can carry in your pocket and hold onto when you feel most vulnerable can also help.
4. **Establish rituals that relax you and provide stability for your spirit and soul.**
† **Breathing exercises** – this is a good place to start the day. You might like to use the prayer above or find one of your own. Some of you might like to combine this with a yoga exercise that can further absorb your stress and help you relax. I love to sit in my sacred space each morning take some deep breaths in and out and use this prayer (or one of our breath cards) to help center me and bring me into a place of quiet and safety.

† **Make time for contemplation.** Ana Lisa De Jong's *The Gate to Heaven: Poems for Contemplation* is a great resource that she has made available for free in the Godspace store. This [tree of contemplative practices](#) gives us good idea of how broadly we can interpret the concept of contemplative prayer. It is usually a prayer that focuses on one word or phrase that is repeated throughout the prayer. This form of prayer mimics a meditative, centering practice. Many of the psalms, like [Psalm 136](#) have a contemplative nature to them. The purpose of contemplative prayer is to draw us close to God and make us better able to hear God's voice by eliminating distraction and reducing anxiety. Breath prayer is one form of this practice. If you don't know what contemplative prayer is, this video with Father Richard Rohr gives a good introduction.

† **Read the scriptures and/or a good devotional or meditative book and/or listen to your favourite hymns** and songs, each morning. Reading the scriptures is a great way to relax ourselves into the presence of God and remind ourselves that no matter where we go and what happens to us God is still with us.

† **Maintain as much normalcy in your daily routines as possible.** A few late mornings sleeping ins because you don't have to go to your workplace might be fun, making a habit of it will, in the long run be detrimental to both your physical and emotional health. So get up, get dressed and make this seem like a normal work day.

† **Don't allow yourself to obsess about the bad news.** Look for good news stories that give you hope and encouragement. There are a lot of them springing up out there. [Here is one](#) that gladdens all our hearts from Sienna Italy where people are caught singing together across empty streets.

† **Get plenty of exercise.** Most of us are not confined to our houses yet, though we probably don't want to visit the local gym so here are some suggestions.

† **Go for a long walk each day** and for added benefit make it an awe and wonder walk and do [a little re-wondering](#) of your world. Getting out into nature is one of the most therapeutic and relaxing things that all of us can do so make sure that you do that.

† **Develop a home exercise regime.** I have a ten minute regime of stretching and muscle strengthening exercises that I do 3 times a week. It is perfect for a time like this and the internet has a plethora of these to choose from.

† **Start a garden.** This is a great time to experiment with a little gardening – plant some seeds, start them inside if it is too cold to get outside yet. Have some fun.

† **Get creative.** Is there a creative pursuit that you have not had time for? This is probably a perfect time to give it a go. Maybe you are a budding artist, musician or writer – take some time to be creative and have some fun with it. When I asked about this on Facebook a couple of days ago a couple of people mentioned [The Gift of Wonder](#) and reminded me that it is full of creative ideas. So this might be a time to pull out your copy out and try some of the creative exercises you have not had time for until now. And don't forget these creative tools:

1. Doodling, drawing, painting or colouring in
2. **Lectio divina** is a particularly fertile ground for imagination and creativity especially when combined with creative acts like drawing, writing and visualization. Lectio Divina is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It is a way of praying the scriptures that leads us deeper into God's word. We slow down. We read a short passage several times. We chew it over slowly and carefully. We savour it. Scripture begins to speak to us in a new way.
3. **Get out, play and have some fun** – Play is a wonderful way to destress ourselves.