

**Sermon Year C Proper 4**  
**St Andrew's Episcopal Church 6-23-2019**  
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### **Introducing myself**

- Attending St. A's since 2003
- Ordained in the Presbyterian church
- A professor of pastoral care at Iliff School of Theology, a Methodist seminary here in Denver
- Was married to George Magnuson, assisting priest here at St Andrew's, who died in October 2019
- A mother of two sons
- My older son Jordan lives in Golden with his wife and my 2 grandsons
- My younger son Alex ended his life through suicide a year ago at the age of 27, after many years of struggles with profound depression

### **The focus of my sermon is spiritual self-care**

In the past year I have grieved my son's death by suicide  
 and then my husband's accidental death,  
 Throughout this year of grief, I have realized over and over again  
 that caring for myself spiritually  
 goes hand in hand with spiritually caring for others.

I teach and write about spiritual care.  
 Many of my students become chaplains.  
 I am convinced that we cannot offer others spiritual care  
 unless we can experience spiritual self-care.

Love your neighbor as yourself.  
 Love is the essence of caring for self and caring for others.  
 Self-care is about experiencing love.  
*Spiritual* self-care is love for self  
 that is grounded in the experience of God, community, and creation.

Many of us know that love *is* the heart of Christianity.

Love describes Jesus.

Many of us here are drawn to worship in the community of St. Andrew's because we experience love here:

in this sanctuary, our liturgy, and the beauty of music.

We experience love in the give and take of supporting and caring for each other.

For me, this love is the way to fulfill promises of faithfulness:

In Christian terms,

- The promises of parents to be faithful to their children, to the best of our abilities,
- The promises made at confirmation

The promises we make to each other in communities of faith

are grounded in the covenantal promises God has made with creation and humanity, throughout the ages.

Our lectionary readings today describe these covenant promises that bind God to God's people.

In Isaiah, the prophet is disgusted and angry with how far the people have strayed from the covenant;

Yet God promises to remain in covenant with them.

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he contrasts the experience of faith, or what I would call faithful love, with the way law functioned for this community.

"In Christ Jesus you are all children of God... There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Faith and faithfulness are about love: the give and take of love.

The gospel story is about the healing of a man in the region of Gerasene, who is called Legion

because, as the story goes, he is possessed by unclean spirits.

There are many tragic aspects of this story,

which is found in both Luke's and Mark's gospels.

No one can help this man,

who has struggled with what we might think of now as mental illness.

He is banished to live in dehumanizing conditions outside of the community.

The most tragic aspect of the story is that even after he is healed,

the people are afraid of him and also Jesus as the healer.

They are stuck in their fear.  
 They live out a covenant of fear  
 because they experienced this man called Legion as life threatening.  
 The only way they could protect themselves was to banish him.

It is part of our animal nature to protect ourselves  
 when we experience life threat.  
 Such fear becomes problematic when it then dominates our live,  
 when we make a covenant with fear, as these people in Luke's story did.

What we now know about fears grounded in life threat  
 Is that when animals, such as deer, experience threat they try to move together as a herd.  
 For many of us, the experience of fear becomes intertwined with the experience of shame,  
 which separates us from others.  
 Shame separates us from others (our herd) and from love.

The most challenging aspect of grief for me over the past year  
 is the experience of being utterly alone,  
 especially when I re-experience childhood family rules  
 that link the intense emotional experience of grief with shame.  
 These family rules are imprinted in my body.  
 The intense emotions of grief make me re-experience my family's covenant of fear  
 that link intense emotions with shame.

When I now experience that childhood covenant of fear and shame,  
 I try to focus on my breathe.  
 I take a deep breath, hold in in for a few seconds and slowly exhale.  
 I invite you to try that now with me.

Now, try doing that while you recall the opening words from Psalm 22:  
 As the deer longs for the water-brooks,  
 so longs my soul for you, O God.

I invite you, this morning, to re-experience the covenant of love through breath,  
 especially when you experience beauty and goodness through our worship together.  
 Breathing in love while listening to sacred choral music  
 has been the way I spiritual care for myself.

So, for example, when I listen to the anthem the choir will sing,  
 I am going to breathe in deeply with the words “I am”:  
 I am the heart that houses the cone,  
 I am the cedar sawn for the cradle,  
 I am the cradle rocking the baby,  
 I am the baby containing the man,  
 I am the man nailed on the cross,  
 I am the cross sawn from the cedar,  
 I am the cedar enclosed in the cone,  
 I am the cone housed in the heart, here in my heart Jesus, springing.

*Words: Kevin Crossley-Holland*

I will also pay attention to take a deep relaxing breath  
 when the choir sings the next anthem:

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,

These breath centered practices of spiritual self-care can help us  
 hold in love the ways our bodies still enact childhood covenants with fear and shame.  
 When we can take in that deep breath and experience love in our bodies,  
 We will embrace shame and fear in love, not judgment.  
 We may become aware, as I have this past year,  
 Of how tenacious fear and shame are.  
 And how painful it can be to experience love that holds the depth of grief and loss.  
 It hurts to love; but in love we will not be alone in that pain.  
 Love continually binds us together with each other,  
 Even when death tears holes in our webs of life.  
 Love binds us together and knits the ragged edges of these holes so that they don’t unravel.  
 Breath in the covenant of love that holds you and me.  
 Take this breath centered practice of spiritual self-care with you,  
 Whenever our bodies remember childhood covenants of fear and shame,  
 We can use our breath to remember  
 That we are children of God  
 and nothing can separate us from God’s love and our love for each other.