

## BREATHING SPACES

Dusk had already slipped into darkness last night when the lights flickered and after a valiant attempt to hold on, died. We groped toward flashlights, fumbled for fresh batteries, and lit the emergency oil lamp, expecting the electricity to surge us back into normalcy before we had finished. We ate dinner by candlelight and listened to the sounds of laughing children in the neighborhood as they spilled outside to glimpse the stars. A half-hour later the first flurry of activity faded with the novelty and we began to settle into the reality of an evening that would be like nothing we'd planned... and, there was so much to do! Each hour of that Sunday evening had tasks waiting to fill it. Dishes needed doing, an article needed writing, e-mail needed checking, a newsletter needed preparation for mailing, and clothes needed washing. No time to just sit, unless, of course in front of the television while **doing** something like folding the laundry.

No time to just sit. My mind flashed back to a warm Sunday afternoon a month before. Six of us had gathered for our regular monthly meeting to plan for a class we lead at our church. Sunday afternoon is the only unclaimed meeting time we have found in common in our busy calendars. We began, as usual, in silence, reconnecting consciously with the One who is as present as the air we take into our bodies. The quiet always awakens a deep longing. "I need more space in my life like this," one woman commented, "otherwise I forget what's really important." Breathing space is basic food for the human spirit, a staple of the spiritual life, and it's rare in our culture and community. As the stories of our lives spilled into the waiting circle, the common thread around the circle was "too much to do." Person after person spoke of lives stretched to the limit with the details of complex family schedules and situations, work demands, church and community participation. All good things, but I remember some wise words: "**The good is the enemy of the best.**"

Is it possible that all the good things we do are in fact de-centering and deforming our lives? Thomas Hart writes, "We can easily be overresponsible for others, willing to be taken advantage of, unable to say no, or burdened in spirit by the suffering of the world. We think we *must* suffer what we suffer, *must* do what we do; it seems to us a moral or spiritual imperative. We often need assistance in finding a truer sense both of our own personal limitations and of what God is really asking." (*Spiritual Quest*, p. 141). This particular Sunday afternoon, one brave soul confessed that she was so busy that morning doing her work for the church that she hadn't made it into worship. There was a pause. The next person confessed the same thing, and the next person, and the next until we realized that 5 of the 6 of us hadn't made it to worship that morning because we were "too busy" doing the work of the church. What an astounding realization and wake up call! Worship is a "breathing space" where we remember who we are and Whose we are and focus again on the central relationship of our lives. The call is to love God first, to focus on God first, and to open to living relationship with God first. With this as the foundation, the love of neighbor and self, and the doing that expresses this love, flows out in balance. I wonder how many of us substitute busyness for love.

As the blackout stretched from minutes into hours, I began finally to sink into the wisdom of ancient sabbath rhythms and into the One who created them. There was a time we couldn't manufacture 24 hours of daylight with the flick of a switch, a time when darkness ushered us into a slowed-down pace, quiet conversation, and rest: Breathing Spaces. I need them, and I need support from others "on the Way" who commit to this sabbath-giving God first and who love me enough to call me to account when I forget. I was one of the 5 who had been "too busy" doing God's work that Sunday morning to sink into the open space of worship. At *Bread of Life* we are exploring ways of deepening community at and through the Center to become more intentional about "walking the talk" by loving God and one another enough to "speak truth with love." The pulls of culture and of our own ingrained habits are so powerful that none of us can walk this way alone. Good intentions and right knowledge are not enough. We invite you too to stop, breathe deeply, and commit to those ways of being that put God first in your life, and we invite you to come alongside of us as we seek to grow in faithful living together.

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