



# 2021 THEME RESOURCES

*breathe*  
the Spirit of life (Rm 8:2)



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# THEME REFLECTION

In this moment of history we could not be more aware of how connected we are. An unknown virus spread from a largely unheard-of city to affect every human being on the planet. Pope Francis has been repeatedly reminding us that *everything is connected* (Laudato Si). I think we can say this realisation is now evident.

Perhaps nothing connects us more intimately than our breath. All life depends upon it and the exchange we have with our breathing green planet. With the average person taking an average of 20,000 breaths each day this subconscious activity can be easy to forget – until we can't do it anymore. It then becomes a powerful symbol of 'life'.

There are some powerful images in Scripture capturing this image of breath as the source of life. The Book of Genesis describes God breathing into the nostrils of human beings the 'breath of life' to make them 'living' beings (Gen 2:7). Breath is also used to express the presence of God, and for Elijah, he experienced God in the sound of a gentle breeze or 'gentle breath' (1 Kings 19:12 cf. Timothy Radcliffe, 'Alive in God', p.266). It is often an evocative image of the Spirit (the Hebrew word for 'spirit', *ruah* is also the word for breath) and it was at Pentecost that Jesus breathed on the disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit is the Spirit who gives life. It unites, connects and pervades all that is: **The Spirit of life** dwells in every human creature and calls us into a relationship with the Divine' (Laudato Si, 88). St Paul speaks of its power and proclaims that it is through Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit gives life and freedom: "For the law of **the Spirit of life** in Christ Jesus has set you free" (Rm 8:2).

Richard Rohr describes the profound intimacy of our breath and the holy. To breathe is to experience the Divine...the *ruah* of God: "A rabbi taught this prayer to me many years ago. The Jews did not speak God's name but breathed it with an open mouth and throat: inhale-Yah; exhale-weh. By our very breathing, we are speaking the name of God and participating in God's breath. This is our first and our last word as we enter and leave the world (Rohr, On Being, p.65)."

As we breathe-in, we feed and nourish our physical bodies and nurture our inner life. But we can't hold our breath. After being fuelled by the breath of the love of God we are compelled to breathe out, to give life to others and creation (Ezk 37:1-14). We are challenged to take up Pope Francis' invitation to become more consciously *guardians of creation, as well as our brothers and sisters in humanity*. Perhaps the moment has never been so urgent to take care of our planet and each other as we face together the uncertainty of a growing pandemic and its impact on the deterioration of life through social isolation, chronic loneliness, snowballing anxiety, economic uncertainty, and the loss of livelihood and life: "The virus of social injustice is as big a challenge as the medical response to COVID-19" (Pope Francis, August 19).

So in this year of the Plenary Council let us be conscious of our need to be attentive to the Spirit of life in discerning our way forward to be a source of fresh air as a Church for the world. May it be an opportunity for us to invite the Spirit of Jesus to enliven, energise, empower and unite us: The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! (Lk 4:18). Let us give thanks that we have been breathed to life God and share in Elihu's prayer of gratitude: "**The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.**" (Job 33:4)

**Anthony Clarke**

Director of Mission and Life Formation

# STAFF LITURGY

## Acknowledgement of Country

"We acknowledge the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ Nation, the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Elders both past and present."

Indigenous artist Sharon Williams from Santa Teresa in the Northern Territory, painted the theme image based on our 2021 theme 'Breathe – The Spirit of Life.' Sharon explains:

"Creation is bigger than just our planet earth. Creation is about everything in the universe - everything *Ngkarte* (God) has put there and all those things have *Ngkartele Utmenge* (God's Spirit) in them. That's why we look after them and care for them. The sun, the stars, the meteors, the big animals and the smallest flower that feeds the bees, and us – we are all part of what we call 'creation' – we are all connected because we all have *Ngkartele Utmenge* in us.

We humans are very blest because we are able to share in *Ngkarte's* creating – It is very precious to be able to share in *Ngkarte's* creating in our Universe."

## As Marists, We Pray

Creator God,

*We are all connected*, you created every human being on the planet in your likeness and image and breathed life into us. Nothing connects us more intimately than our *breathing*. Our breath has become a symbol of life itself. We give thanks for this interconnectedness, that we are part of a global community who are called to live as brothers and sisters. Help us to recognise the calls and needs of our neighbours, to be people of compassion and forgiveness.

Amen.

*God is revealed to us through those we meet. Young and old people, members of our families and communities, the refugee and prisoner, the sick person and the caregiver, our co-worker and our neighbour, all are mirrors reflecting the God of life and of love.*

*We experience God also in the witness of people committed to peace, justice, and solidarity with the poor and those who act with generosity and self-sacrifice in the service of others.*

*Water from the Rock, 55-56*

# A Reading from Genesis 2: 4-9

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

# Gospel Luke 10: 25-37

## The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

### Reader 1

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

### Reader 2

*To whom do I show compassion?*

PAUSE

*Are my thoughts and deeds like those of the Samaritan?*

PAUSE

*Do I turn a blind eye to the stranger who needs my help?*

PAUSE



The Good Samaritan by Vincent Van Gogh



### Reader 1

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

### Reader 2

*To whom do I offer my services?*

PAUSE

*Who is deserving of my attention, of my care?*

PAUSE

*Am I responding to the cries of the poor, the homeless and the helpless?*

PAUSE

### Reader 1

"Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### Reader 2

*How do I show mercy?*

PAUSE

*To whom do I show mercy?*

PAUSE

*Who are my brothers and sisters?*

PAUSE



# As Marists, We Reflect

Pope Francis tells us that one can know the whole Bible, know all the liturgical rubrics, know all the theology but, from this knowing, loving is not automatic. Loving has another way. Intelligence is needed, but also something more...

The priest and the Levite saw but ignored; looked but did not provide. Yet true worship does not exist if it is not translated into service to one's neighbour. Let us never forget it: in the face of the suffering of so many people destroyed by hunger, by violence and by injustices, we cannot remain spectators. What does it mean to ignore man's suffering? It means to ignore God! If I do not approach that man, or that woman, that child, that elderly man or elderly woman that is suffering, I do not come close to God.

But what is at the centre of the parable: the Samaritan, that is, in fact, the one who was scorned, the one on whom no one would have wagered anything and who, nevertheless, also had his commitments and his things to do — when he saw the wounded man, he did not pass beyond like the other two, who were linked to the Temple, but “he had compassion”, that is, his heart, was moved; he was moved within! That is the difference. The other two “saw, but their hearts remained closed, cold. Instead, the Samaritan's heart was attuned to God's heart itself. In fact, compassion is an essential characteristic of God's mercy. God has compassion for us. What does it mean? He suffers with us; He feels our sufferings. Compassion means: “to share with.” The word indicates that something within us moves and trembles on seeing another who is suffering or in pain. And in the gestures and the actions of the Good Samaritan we recognise God's merciful action. It is the same compassion with which the Lord comes to meet each one of us: He does not ignore us; He knows our sorrows; He knows how much we need help and consolation. He comes close to us and never abandons us. He waits: He is patient and is always at our side.

- Encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship



*The Good Samaritan by He Qi*

## **Our Marist Spirituality Compels Us to Reflect**

*Jesus' message is simple but challenging: Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus not only preaches communion, he lives it. At its heart, Christianity is communion made real in the love of neighbour. In Christ we find that a common mission unites us in community, and, in turn, community impels us to mission.*

*Water from the Rock, 95*

# As Marists, We Pray

Creator God,

Jesus taught us that the Samaritan behaved with true mercy: he dressed the man's wounds, he took him to the inn, took personal care of him and provided for his assistance. Remind us that compassion and love mean taking care of the other even to if it requires paying in person. Help us to commit ourselves to come close to the other, to the point of identifying ourselves with him, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to keep Your Commandment.

Guide us in following the same path of the Good Samaritan, who is a figure of Christ. May we continue to recall that Jesus bent over us, made Himself our servant, and in doing so, He saved us, so that we, too, are able to love as He loved us, in the same way.

Saint Marcellin Champagnat, *pray for us*  
Mary our Good Mother, *pray for us*  
Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, *pray for us*  
And let us always remember, *to pray for one another*



Creation and the Universe by Sharon Williams

*breathe*  
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Amen.



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### Reader 2

*What does it mean to be compassionate?*

PAUSE

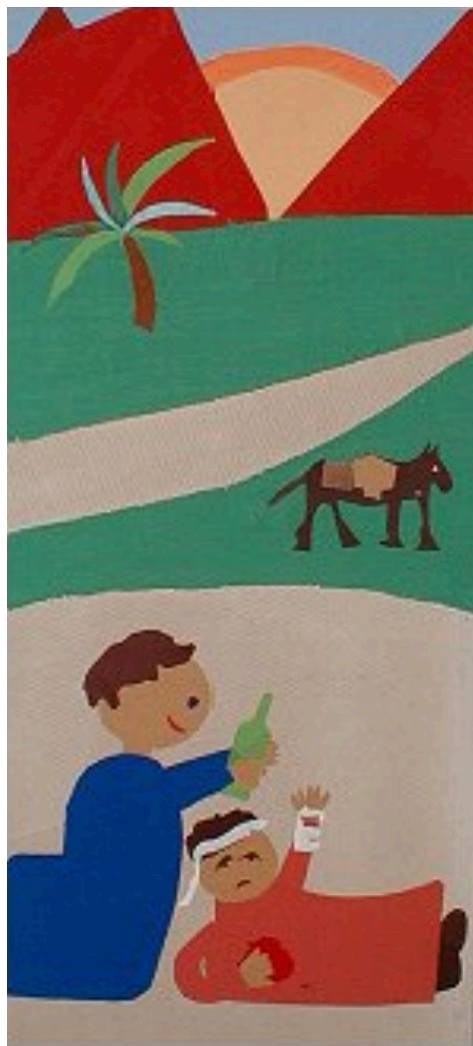
*Do you act and think like the Samaritan?*

PAUSE

*Do you ignore those around you who are calling out for help?*

PAUSE





**Reader 1**

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

**Reader 2**

*Who do I offer help to?*

PAUSE

*Who deserves my attention and my care?*

PAUSE

*How am I helping the poor, the homeless and the helpless?*

PAUSE

**Reader 1**

"Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

**Reader 2**

*Do I know what it means to 'have mercy'?*

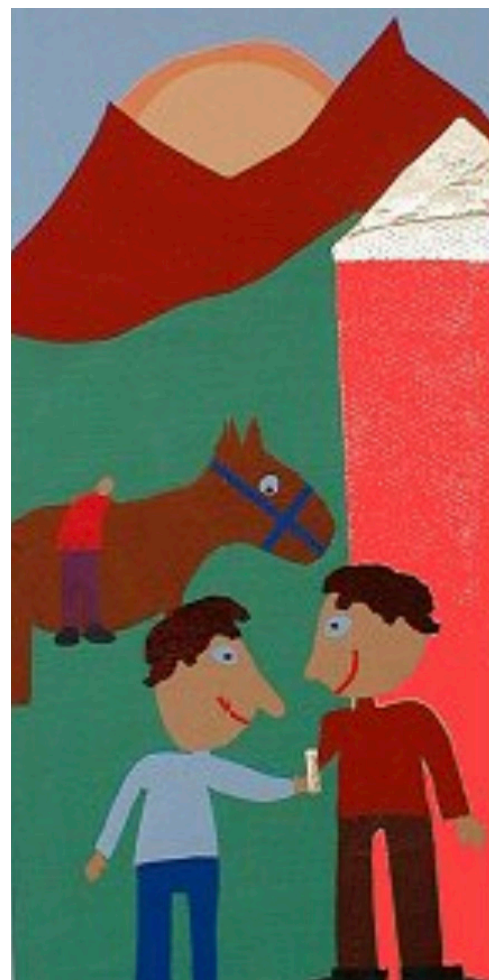
PAUSE

*In what way do I show this mercy?*

PAUSE

*Who are my brothers and sisters?*

PAUSE



# As Marists, We Reflect

Are you just like the robber in the parable - the one who doesn't consider anyone's needs but their own? Do you think that it is justifiable to hurt others if it means that you get what you want, what you think you deserve, what you believe is owed to you?

Are you just like the priest in the parable who walked past the injured man- the one who sees themselves as being more important than those around them, who is superior and whose ego rules both their head and their heart therefore they cannot consider the needs of others?

Are you just like the Levite in the parable who saw what had happened but again, just walked past the injured man- the one who calls themselves neighbour and friend but only in good times, the one who becomes a stranger when times are tough and when they are needed the most?

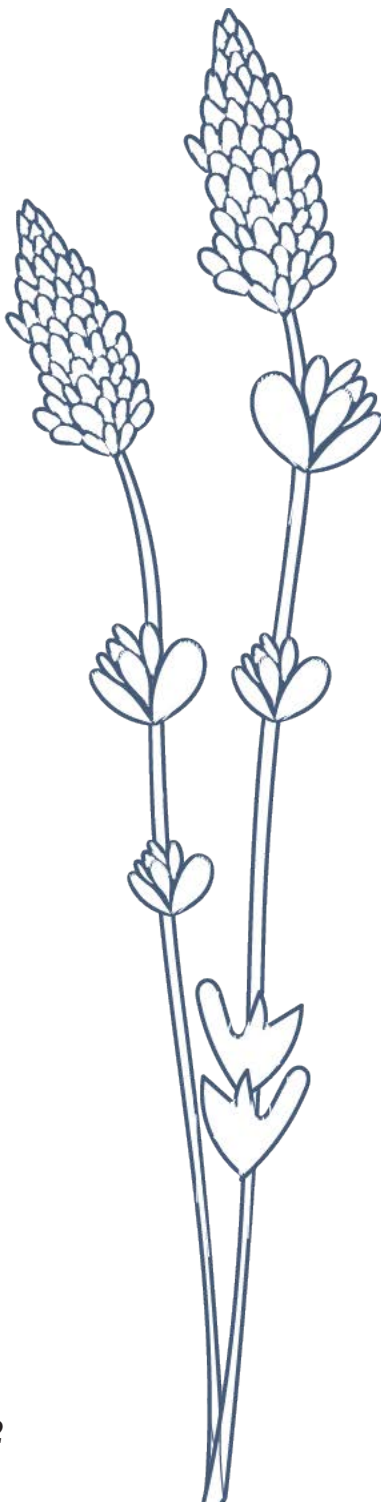
Or are you just like the Samaritan in the parable, that is the one who people underestimate and don't know well enough to know that you are compassionate, that you care for your neighbours, that you regard all of humanity as your neighbour- are you the one that people will always remember because of the way you made them feel, because of the way you listened and because of the way you cared?

In the gestures and the actions of the Good Samaritan we recognise God's mercy. It is the same compassion with which the Lord comes to meet each one of us: He does not ignore us; He knows our sorrows; He knows how much we need help and consolation. He comes close to us and never abandons us. He waits: He is patient and is always at our side.

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# As Marists, We Pray

Creator God,

Jesus taught us that the Samaritan behaved with true mercy: he dressed the man's wounds, he took him to the inn, took personal care of him and provided for his assistance. Remind us that compassion and love mean taking care of the other even to if it requires paying in person. Help us to commit ourselves to come close to the other, to the point of identifying ourselves with him, to love our neighbour as ourselves, to keep Your Commandment.

Guide us in following the same path of the Good Samaritan, who is a figure of Christ. May we continue to recall that Jesus bent over us, made Himself our servant, and in doing so, He saved us, so that we, too, are able to love as He loved us, in the same way.

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Creation and the Universe by Sharon Williams

*breathe*  
the Spirit of life (Rm 8:2)



# PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

May your Spirit, Lord, continue to enlighten, inspire and inform our Church leaders. May Pope Francis continue to be a beacon of hope and light for us all.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***

May your Spirit, Lord, continue to guide our conscience, to help us in being people who serve others, people who offer care, who offer love and who support each other, as brothers and sisters.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***

May your Spirit, Lord, influence world leaders and the peoples of all nations to be bridge builders and keepers of peace. May the needs of the poor, the marginalised and the exploited be at the forefront of their policy making and their works toward social justice.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***

May your Spirit, Lord, continue to protect our nurses, doctors, teachers, counsellors, social workers, health care workers and first responders who are brothers and sisters to the sick and neglected. May they always be assured of your love.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***

May your Spirit, Lord, bring comfort to those who are physically, mentally and emotionally ill, may they find support in knowing your love is unconditional and everlasting.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***

May your Spirit, Lord, remind us that our \_\_\_\_\_ community is a family, a family that grew out of the love that St Marcellin Champagnat had for Jesus and Mary his Good Mother. May we always remember that as a family, as brothers and sisters gathered around your table, we are responsible for the love and care of each other as was entrusted to us by your son Jesus.

**Let us breathe your spirit of life.**

***Lord hear our prayer.***



## Visio Divina

**Visio Divina means “sacred seeing”** — it is an ancient form of Christian prayer in which we allow our hearts and imaginations to enter into a sacred image, in silence, to see what God might have to say to us.

The image that we will be using for this exercise is *Deep Breath* by Melanie Weidner (located on the next page).

### **1. Prepare your heart for prayer**

Close your eyes, breathe, clear your mind, and ask God to enter this time of prayer with you. Ask God to speak to you through this image.

### **2. Allow the image to speak to your heart**

Open your eyes and look at the image. Let your eyes pause and focus on the part of the image your eyes are first drawn to. Gaze upon that part of the image for a minute or two. Then close your eyes, still seeing that part of the image in your mind.

### **3. Reflect on the entire image**

Open your eyes and now look upon the whole image. Look at all of the image, allowing it to draw forth a word, an emotion, or an image in your heart. What do you hear God whispering into your heart? What thoughts or questions is this image raising? What emotions do you feel? Continue to gaze and reflect as long as you need to, then briefly close and rest your eyes.

### **4. Rest and Reflect in God**

As you close out your time in prayer, open your eyes and reflect on the image one more time. Rest in God’s presence as you reflect upon this prayer experience. Consider how you’ll take this into your life today, tomorrow, next month, next year.





*Deep Breath* by Melanie Weidner





# As I Breathe the Sweet Air

**by Andrew Blakemore**

As I breathe the sweet air all around me,  
And I gaze at the beautiful sky,  
Far over the valleys and mountains,  
An eagle is soaring so high.

As I see all the sights of the country,  
And drink from the rivers and streams,  
I feel such a strong sense of freedom,  
For this is the place of my dreams.

As I hear all the wonderful bird songs,  
That float through the woodland I roam,  
I gaze at the trees all around me,  
And know that this place is my own.

As I smell all the scents of the flowers,  
Their colours so vivid and strong,  
And knowing wherever I wander,  
My heart here shall always belong.

**We reflect:** As you breathe the sweet air around you, think about all that you have to be grateful for, all that you have been blessed with... Talk to God....

# How to Practice Breath Prayer

Though not a well-known practice, Breath Prayer is shaped by the action most essential to our lives: our very breath. It is our first action on the day we are born and our final act on the day that we die. Breath plays a central role in Scripture, too, from the very beginning in which God breathes life into human form and throughout the text, which Paul describes in 2 Timothy as “God-breathed.” Even the words for “spirit” in Hebrew (*ruach*) and Greek (*pneuma*)—the two languages in which the Bible was originally written—can also mean “breath.” It seems breath is not only essential to our physical existence but our spiritual nourishment, too.

The Breath Prayer that we know today originated with the Desert Mothers and Fathers as a way to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Considered foundational to contemplation and a way to cultivate silence and attention, the Desert Mothers and Fathers would take a short excerpt of Scripture, breathing in with the first part of the text and breathing out with the next, repeating this pattern for extended periods of time. While any text would do, the most common Scripture used for Breath Prayer became “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” echoing the petition made by the tax collector in Luke 18:13.

Over time the text and the prayer that accompanies it became known as the “*Jesus Prayer*” or “*Prayer of the Heart*” in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, shortening to “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or even simply “Jesus, mercy.” Breath Prayer, too, began to expand beyond the use of Scriptures, becoming a way to invoke the name of God and ask for help in just a few short words.

With the scientific knowledge we have today on mindfulness and the effectiveness of deep breathing on the body, mind, and soul, it’s no wonder that this form of prayer gently but surely transformed those who practiced it. Science tells us that our brains are constantly transforming and are shaped by what we focus on. For example, while anxiety begets anxiety, focusing on peace can lead to a sense of peace. We also know that deep breathing directly impacts the part of the brain where stress dwells, encouraging our nervous system to slow down and eventually melt into the present moment.

When we combine the positive reinforcement of the mind through a meditative phrase with the deep breathing that relaxes the body and centres the soul, we become less reactive and more receptive to the presence of God in us and in the world. Breath Prayer is indeed a holistic practice for body, mind, and soul, and as it clears the path for you to abide in Christ (the very union of the spiritual and the physical) it also makes space within for Christ to dwell in you. As you cultivate your practice, you’ll likely find that even when your prayer has finished, the effects of the prayer will remain, your sense of God’s presence as close to you as your very breath.

<https://www.asacredjourney.net/how-to-practice-breath-prayer/>



# How to Practice Breath Prayer

Breath Prayer is as informal as they come, requiring only a simple phrase and the breath you carry with you every moment throughout the day. While it is undoubtedly valuable when practiced in silence and solitude for an extended period of time (scientists say that 12 minutes of deep breathing each day is enough to transform the mind) — set a soothing timer. It can also be practiced during everyday tasks, such as washing the dishes or commuting to work, allowing even the most mundane moments of the day to be whitewashed with the Sacred.

## 1. **Chosen phrase. “Spirit, breath, peace.”**

*You use the inward breath to name what you would like to receive — “spirit, breath” and the outward breath to state what you would like to release “peace.”*

2. **Breathe in and out**, with the first part of your prayer coming to mind on the inward breath and the latter half connecting with the outward breath.

3. **Continue your prayer** for a set period of time or until you feel you have reached a sense of inner stillness as you dwell in the presence of God.



# How to Practice Lectio Divina

*Lectio Divina* is a contemplative way of reading the Bible. It is a way of praying Scripture that leads us deeper into God's Word. We slow down. We read a short passage more than once. We reflect over it slowly and carefully. We savour it. Scripture begins to speak to us in a new way. It speaks to us personally; it aids that union we have with God through Christ who is Himself the Living Word.

## 1. lectio | read

Read the below passage through many times, Genesis 2: 4-9. Read it aloud, read it silently, read it slowly, pausing between each line or phrase.

As you continue to read the text, listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you: What draws you in? What resonates with you? What makes you uncomfortable? What leaves you with questions? You will take this word or phrase with you into the next step, meditation.

## 2. meditatio | meditate

Now it's time to focus on the word or phrase that stood out to you. Bring the word or phrase to mind and meditate on it; repeat it in your mind slowly, noticing what comes up for you. As feelings emerge, let them sink in without distracting you from your meditation — the word or phrase might still have more to give.

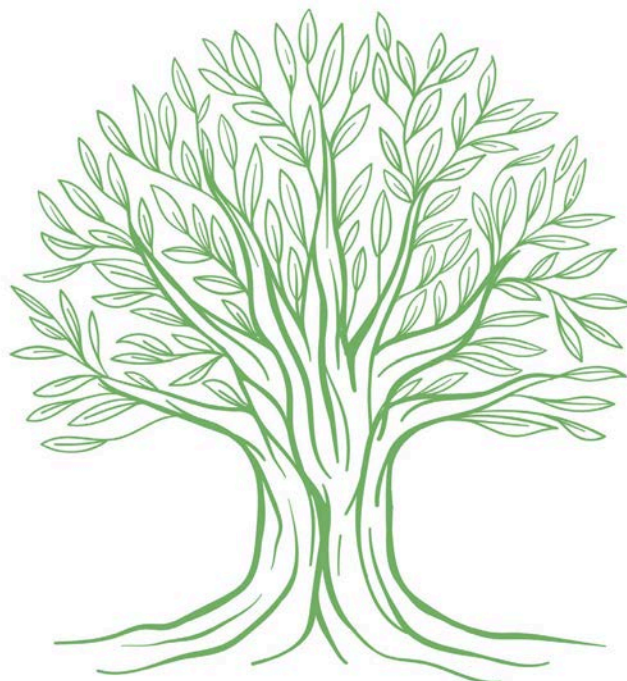
## 3. oratio | pray

As you transition from meditation into prayer, begin communicating with God about the word or phrase that stood out to you. Explore what made it capture your attention initially and share any feelings that came up for you during your meditation. As you share these things in prayer, take note of any new insight you are given in regard to the text and/or what has been awakened in you through your word or phrase.

## 4. contemplatio | contemplate

As your time in prayer comes to a close, spend a few minutes in God's presence contemplating what has happened within you throughout the time of reading, meditation, and prayer. Bring to mind any new insights you've received during this time, whether personal or in relation to the text, and let them sink in, let them colour your way of being. You might be surprised how much such a simple and quiet process can alter your perspective and give you new direction.

*Note: While Lectio Divina is traditionally practiced with Scripture, it can also be practiced using poetry or song, or, as in the practice of Visio Divina, with a work of art or even a scene outside your door.*



# Lectio Divina

## Genesis 2: 4-9

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,

when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—

for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;

but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—

then the LORD God formed humankind from the dust of the ground,

and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being.

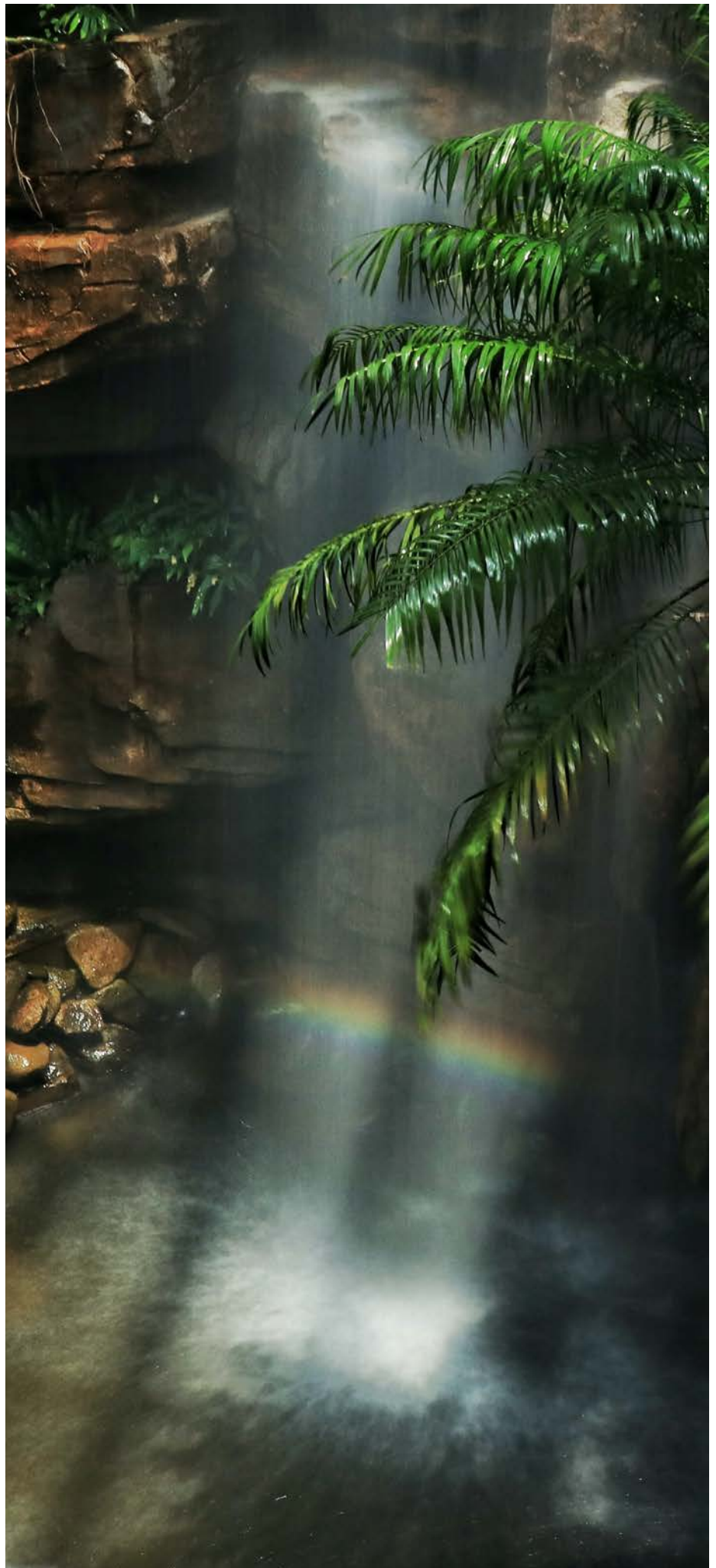
And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east;

and there he put the human whom he had formed.

Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food,

the tree of life also in the midst of the garden,

and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.



# The Baptism of Jesus



## Mark 1:2-11

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

# *Imaginative Contemplation*

**Imaginative Contemplation** is meeting God through story. The prayer develops as you “live into” a Scripture story with all your senses and imagination. You become a participant in the story, and you continue in the story in your heart, mind, imagination, spirit and body after the reading ends. You let the Spirit guide the prayer - you don’t force anything to happen - you let it happen to you, within you, around you.

## **John the Baptist**

Look around at the olives on the trees, they are not yet ready for harvest. There are many things you could do around the orchard but are feeling restless. You tell your wife that you are go into town for a little while, but you are reluctant, almost embarrassed to tell her why. You have heard that John, son of Zechariah, would be preaching and baptising along the river today. The whole region is talking about “John the Baptist” and crowds have been following him from town to town.

Your wife is a good woman and you are not unhappy in your life, but lately you have had stirrings in your heart that you are confused about. Something has seemed empty, waiting. It sounds odd to say it aloud – and who would understand such things? But it seems you even hear the scriptures with a deeper awareness these days. You know that people have been longing for a saviour since the time of our ancestors. We know he will come. But when? Somehow all of these feelings you can’t describe have brought you here to the banks of the Jordan.

You look around at the river, scores of people sit along the bank, stand on the hill or line up in the waters, awaiting their baptism. “Come clean! Be baptised in the waters,” John calls out to the crowd. “Be forgiven!”

John is a riveting sight with his quiet intensity, his camel skin garb and his wild hair flying in so many directions. You let yourself down onto an un-crowded section of the riverbank next to a man about your own age who gives you a welcoming nod as you join him. Letting the water flow over your feet you watch the commotion. Dozens of people have waded into the water in front of John. As each person approaches, he speaks to them quietly, prays over them and helps them drop into the water and back up.

“Are you the Messiah?” someone calls out. He stops and shakes his head, his response, deliberate: “I am a messenger.” Then he adds, “One mightier is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals.”

“I baptise with water,” John says. “He will baptise with the Holy Spirit!”

The man next to you stands up in the waters and moves away from the bank a little. You stay seated, wanting to be a part of all of this, yet hanging back. John looks up to see your companion and walks over toward you, breaking into a smile. The two men embrace as if they are family and the affection between them is clear.

“Jesus,” John says warmly then gestures questioningly toward the water. “You?” Jesus smiles and nods and you feel something move in your heart when you hear the soft words from John’s lips, “I am not worthy.”

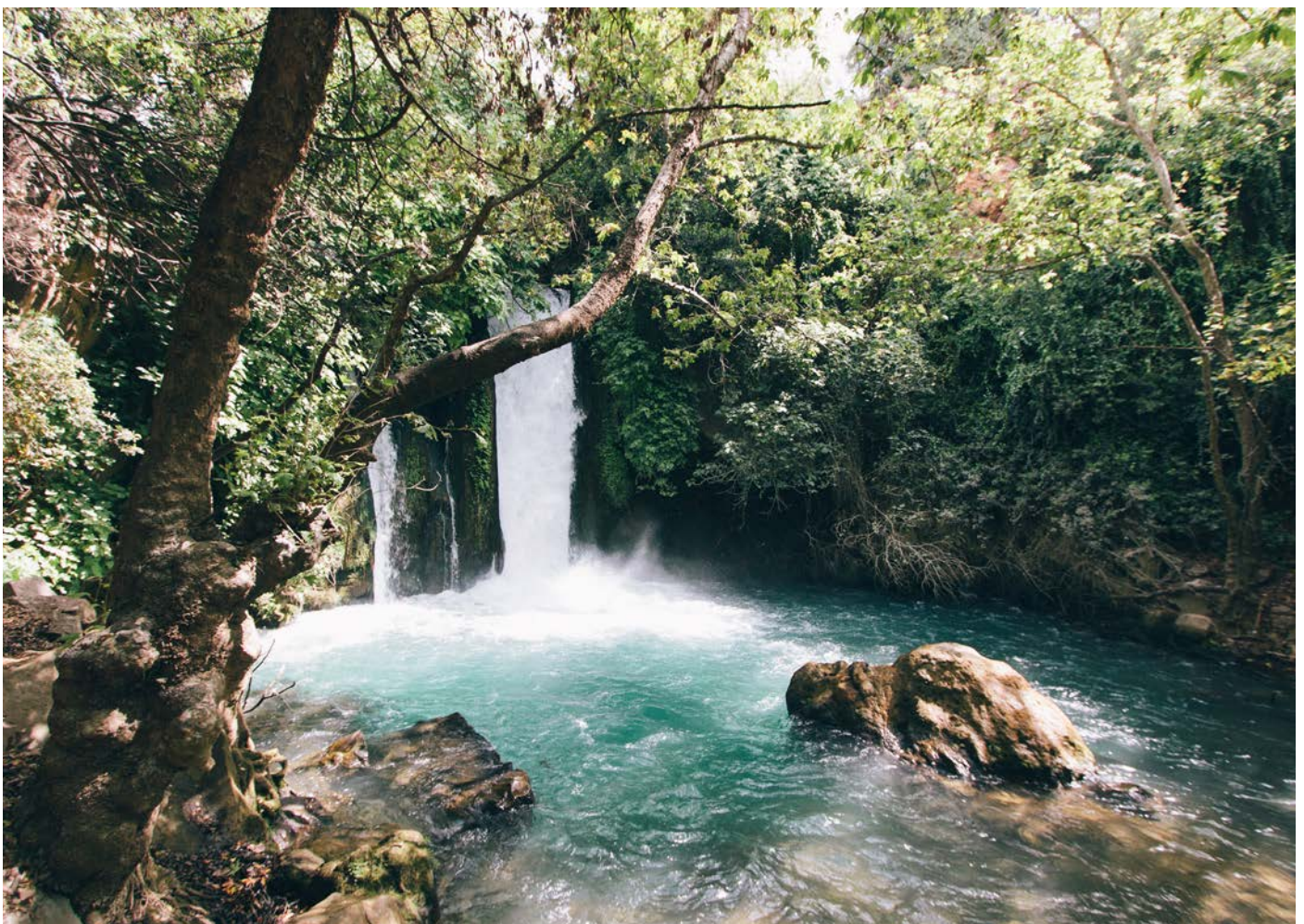
John prays over Jesus as he had the others and plunges him into the river. But as Jesus bursts back up through the water, an odd thing happens. The sky, which had hung with heavy clouds all morning, parts a little and an unusual piercing light brightened the area.

You wonder if others see this light too. The hair on your neck raises as you hear a voice, large, warm and loving as you feel a breath, the Spirit descend. You're not sure where it came from, but it is everywhere at once and right in front of you. "You are my beloved son," the voice says. "I am so pleased with you."

You look at Jesus. Beloved son? What does that mean? Some of the light that now shimmered on the river glows in your soul. Your heart now full where there had been emptiness moments earlier - yet you understand nothing more. You look around at the crowd. You can see by their faces that some have seen and heard what happened. But others looked as if their lives are untouched.

Jesus embraces John once again and turns to walk out of the water. You turn toward the bank as Jesus walks past you and then you follow him as you knew you had to. He offers a hand as you climb out of the water. He looks at you with eyes that seem to match the voice you had heard. Warm, big, intense. Those eyes seem to understand everything about you. Even the empty places in your life and the hunger for something you can't name. You know in that moment that your life has changed dramatically. You will never have that empty feeling again. Yes, you go home to your orchard, your wife and family but somehow, you will follow this man, Jesus.

**We reflect:** Take a few minutes to pause and reflect on this experience, being on the shores of the Jordan.





# *In Heaven*

**by Mark Belletini**

Blest is our breath, in and out, quiet,  
blest is our sitting, our fidgeting, our movement,  
blest is our heartbeat echoing  
the pounding alleluias of the distant stars,  
blest is the silence that is presence,  
not absence.



# Connections

by Nancy Wood

Every time we take a breath, we become the universe.  
The very moment of creation is contained in us and  
passes on to rocks and trees, animals and fish.  
The old ones say the essence of life is in water and  
wind, earth and breath, fire and bone,  
but most of all in breath,  
our first connection to the elk, the hawk, the bear, and  
the buffalo.  
Without breath, no connection.  
Without connection, no creation.  
Without creation, no breath.  
This is the sacred circle of life, unbroken.



# A Breathing Meditation

by Wayne Mueller

One beautiful form of meditation is to simply follow the breath. Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Let yourself become aware of the physical sensation of the breath, feeling the shape, texture, and duration of the inhale and the exhale. Do not change your breathing, do not strain or push in any way. Simply feel the breath breathe itself. Feel the rhythm of the breath, feel its timing, the end of the exhale, the readiness to inhale. When the mind wanders – as it will – do not worry. Simply return your awareness to your breath. Silently note each inhale or exhale, mentally noting in, out or rising, falling. Do this for five minutes at first. What do you notice about the rhythm of rest in your breathing?

What do you notice about the rhythm of breath in your body?



# Inhaling God's Exhale

Jesus says to the hiding, huddled, frightened disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so send I you." Then he breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Fresh from the grave, with lungs full of Spirit in motion, with wounds still visible on his body, Jesus gets as close as he can to his frightened disciple, releases some long whooshing breaths on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

I wonder, what did they do in response? Did they try not to breathe in?

Did they cover their faces? Did they shrink back from Jesus?

Or were they like a baby whose mother blows in his face so that he gulps his lungs full of air before being dunked under the water?

Did they gasp in surprise and take in that Holy Spirit breath without even meaning to?

And I wonder if they knew that day what it would even mean to inhale that Jesus-Spirit holy exhale? I wonder if they knew that it would make them fearless.

I wonder if they knew that it would draw them into a community in which no one claimed private ownership of any possessions but held everything in common.

I wonder if they knew that they would become a community in which everyone was welcomed, regardless of social class, skin colour, nationality, gender or personhood. I wonder if they knew that they would face opposition, and even death if they inhaled that God — Jesus — Holy Spirit exhale.

**We reflect:** What is it you wonder?

<http://olddutchchurch.org/sermon/inhaling-gods-exhale/>





### **Scripture Readings:**

Genesis 2:27  
Ezekiel 37:4  
1 Kings 19:12  
Romans 8:2  
Luke 4:18

### **Suggested Music:**

Breathe by Jonny Diaz  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnjeMwxFuBA>

Breathe on Me  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHnomHnH51A>

Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nbMfLQd2P4>

Breath, what a friend I found.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9TJYd3AKDI>

Breath of God  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIP1PusCcQY>

### **Suggested Clips, Animated:**

The story of The Good Samaritan (Lego)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMYGa5Z\\_wbI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMYGa5Z_wbI)

Pentecost explained using Lego  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvy- DayaoC>

Kung Fu Panda 2- Inner Peace  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IAKfUD169U>

The Breathing Bubble  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxayUBd6T7M&list=PLqZjwzLq3\\_YG4tqkHwmMPrFafhgY-5FEcj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxayUBd6T7M&list=PLqZjwzLq3_YG4tqkHwmMPrFafhgY-5FEcj)

Karate Kid  
When Life is out of focus....breathe  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XemAlj9\\_qKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XemAlj9_qKE)

Ruah explained

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNNZO9i1Gjc>

“At the end of my life, with just one breath left, if you come, I’ll sit up and sing.” Rumi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdElzvGIZbo>

Breathin calm App

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZGuQHCjvqY>

One breath around the world

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnvQggy3Ezw>



Creation and the Universe by Sharon Williams

*breathe*  
the Spirit of life (Rm 8:2)