



**Day 3 | Thursday, March 10, 2022**  
**Presenter Leonetta Elaiho**

Here on the third day of the Novena, we gather together in the Beloved community asking to be renewed in the Spirit of the living God. Thank you for being here for this important collective work.

I want to start with a confession. Today's Gospel reading has been a bit of a stumbling block for me.

Perhaps like some of you, I have a situation in my life that I have repeatedly prayed and asked God to change. I have asked for answers to situations in my life where God seems silent. It has felt like I have knocked and knocked and knocked, only to wonder if anyone was home. No door seemed to open for me. Personally, though certainly not unique to me, our family has dealt with chronic illness which has broken us all open to what at times has felt like unrelenting sorrow and pain. This, on top of the collective experience we are all having through a pandemic, ongoing and perpetual racial violence and inequities, war, and the mass exodus of families fleeing their homelands for safety and refuge. Here in Seattle and so many places around the world the number of unhoused people continues to create a moral crisis that we cannot ignore. Most of you gathered here are coming here with specific prayer intentions, specific requests for God to answer, heal, deliver, and bless. At times like this, it seems our collective sorrow reaches a choral crescendo of pain, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken us?"

Jesus, of course, knows this pain. The same Christ that offers what seems like a fail-proof plan of certitude—ask, receive; knock, open; seek, find—later, this Christ intimately knows the pangs of sorrow and unanswered requests.

While crying out and asking if God might take this cup from him, exasperated in desperation, Jesus resigns his desires and says, "nevertheless not my will, but yours be done."

I know I have been feeling this desperation and resignation lately. Perhaps I am not alone.

My life in faith has taught me that God truly sustains us in all things but protects us from nothing.

If God is answering us, God may not be telling us what we want to hear. Instead of taking the crosses we bear from us, the response may be to pick up your cross and walk.

If God is opening a door to us, it may not be the one we want to walk through. The door of cancer, the door of mental health challenges, the door of addiction, the door of broken relationships, the door of losing a child—all of these life realities open us to journeys and pathways that we would rather not take.

How then are we to experience the good things that our heavenly Abba wants to bestow upon us as Jesus taught the disciples?

When our anxiety and fear raise in response to questions that we cannot answer, and situations we cannot control, many of us have been taught to come back to mindful breathing. So, in these times, I have been thinking and talking a lot about breath lately.

Years ago, when I was in training to be a birth doula, I learned that one of the most powerful and difficult breaths that we have all ever taken, was our very first breath. Whether medically assisted or not, the *magnus opus* of the miracle of life happens when the lungs take in the first breath and inflate for the first time. And, they will stay inflated, moving life critical oxygen through our body, until our very last breath.

Let us take a deep breath together.

We are participating in the most basic human function, and yet the most sacred and animating life force at the same time. Many psalmists have described Christ as the “air we breathe”.

Breath responds to our circumstances without our conscious awareness. Breathing is the only function of the autonomic nervous system that is both voluntary and involuntary. If we run or workout, we will begin to pant. When we fall into deep sleep, our breath is slow and rhythmic. When we are startled, and afraid, we may breathe rapidly or even hold our breath. These reactions come without much cognitive direction. They are second nature.

This too is the way of the Spirit. Present, working, modulating, sustaining us in the background sometimes without thought or consciousness—whether we are present to it or not. Collectively as we breathe, we are receiving a good thing from God.

But breath also responds to our directives. It can be partnered with for our own good as well. When I am doing yoga, I can send breath to the places of pain and tightness I feel; inhale, into the tension; exhale, release and make room. The breath is also a regulator. When our nervous system is activated by stress, fear, or feelings of threatened safety, our fight or flight system is activated. Our parasympathetic system can put the brakes on this response and bring us into deep states of peace and relaxation—all mobilized by controlling our breath.

This too, is the way of the Spirit. While the outcomes are often mysterious and unclear, God does respond to our petitions and our prayers. Even as we ask, seek, knock and await responses, we can trust that we are receiving good things from God. Even if they remain unseen.

In this way, the renewal in the Spirit of God is both voluntary and involuntary. It is as intentional and voluntary as showing up for this 9-day experience of prayer inspired by St. Francis Xavier. And it is as involuntary as laughing, weeping, and as breathing. All this is how we are renewed again and again, by committing ourselves to the faithful and sometimes slow work of transformation, and also by simply positioning ourselves to receive the grace of renewal.

I want to share with you again a few verses from our gospel reading in the book of Matthew Chapter 7, verse 7 from the First Nations Version, an Indigenous translation of the New Testament. It reads:

*Let your prayers rise like the smoke to the Great Spirit, for he will see and answer you. Every step is a prayer, and as you dance upon the earth for the things you seek, the way will open before you. In the same way, as you search for the true ancient pathways, you will find them. Answers will come to the ones who ask, good things will be found by the ones who search for them, and the way will open before the ones who keep dancing their prayers.*

May we receive renewal with the ease and simplicity of breathing. May we get up from the place of our pain and sorrow and keep dancing our prayers.

As we enter into a short period of silence, I encourage you to ask for the grace of courage, to allow yourself to feel and hold all the pains of our lives, knowing that we do so with the help of God.

I also invite you to consider reflecting on what may be present in your Spirit right now or simply just taking a moment to breath perhaps. There are also reflection questions printed in your booklet if that is helpful for you.