

## THE SPIRITUALITY OF OUR RELIGION

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In the only non-COVID, non-George-Floyd-related post on my Facebook page this week, I shared a headline from *The Economist* magazine that “The virus is accelerating de-churching in America.”

Indeed, SPC is something of an anomaly within American Christendom these days: a congregation that is not only holding steady in its membership but is, in fact, actually growing.

One of the reasons we are bucking the trend at SPC, I would argue, may very well be that this congregation has found a way to embrace the culture of “the spiritual but not religious.”

It all begins with the word “spiritual.”

The very basic bottom line basis of spirituality—in any tradition, but especially in the Christian tradition—is simply about our breath. The *ruach* in Hebrew. The *pneuma* in Greek. The *spiritus* in Latin. And if you’re into yoga the *prana* of our *pranayama* in Sanskrit.

In biblical terms this means that the *ruach* of God—or the *Spirit* of God—that forms humanity by breathing through the irrigated dust of the earth literally still flows through our bodies as we breathe in and breathe out. And as we struggle to breathe in and breathe out. And as our breathing in and out is strangled out of us.

What’s more, the *ruach* or *spirit* of God literally binds all of humanity with *all of creation*, as we in the animal kingdom breathe in oxygen from the exhale of the plant kingdom. And our inhale becomes the carbon dioxide we exhale, so that plants have something to inhale in return.

The bottom line, in the Christian tradition, is that spirituality isn’t something we *do* as *individuals* that makes us somehow unique or somehow more enlightened or somehow “not religious.”

Spirituality is instead about *paying attention* to what is *already happening* in the breathing, pulsing, symbiotic union of creation that flows together in the fullness of “spirit.” And spirituality is instead about *paying attention* to what is *already happening* in the shattering, squelching, intentional snuffing out of that same spirit, as in the case of George Floyd and Eric Garner, whose last words on this earth were “I can’t breathe.”

Our definition of spirituality tells us *their* snuffed out breath must become *our* snuffed out breath, as we choke to death together on the stench of white supremacy and pray for true spiritual transformation.

It may sound strange in our 21<sup>st</sup> century American ‘take what you like and leave the rest’ religious culture, but it is in fact our *spirituality* that is more demanding of us than our religion!

In this country, in this culture, by and large we have the freedom to choose our shared religion. But—if our definitions are true—we actually do not have the freedom to choose our shared spirituality.

It simply *is*. Simply because we have a shared breath.

Which brings us to the definition of “religion.” It comes from the Latin word *religio*, which means “to bind.” And that may sound scary if we fear being bound to a religion of condemnation.

But our definition of spirituality tells us we are *already bound* to the *whole* of creation. By the union of our breath. And by the union of our snuffed-out-too-soon breath.

Our *religion* is a formal acknowledgment of this spiritual bond we already share. In our religion we make a choice to join together with a particular group of people and within a particular tradition that commits us to action on behalf of the breath that is all-too threatened in our already spiritual bond. The way we at SPC are, in our own imperfect way, responding to racism and heterosexism and environmental degradation.

Our religion was not ever meant to be about the baggage of dogma and indoctrination for fear of going to hell. It was always meant to be about coming together in a common covenant so we can be there for one another when our common life takes us through hell and back, as it is doing right now.

Yes, it may sometimes seem easier to be spiritual but not religious. Believe me, I *know* the struggle it is to bind ourselves to an institution that can so often seem so far away from the kingdom of God we are called to proclaim. There are times that I too want to chuck it all and go meditate forever on the top of a mountain somewhere.

But the struggle of creation to breathe in the fullness of the Spirit of God demands more from us than pseudo-spiritual escapism.

And the Christian community Presbyterian Version is still the place I want to practice the spirituality that already binds us to the fullness of creation. And calls us to repair the breach of racism and heterosexism and environmental degradation.

And so I hope you will join me in shouting alleluia to God for the gift of the Spirit that, please God, is still coming upon us at Pentecost to renew both the spiritual *and* religious face of the earth.

Amen.