



## Treading Water

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In advanced swimming lessons and in lifeguard training, many years ago, treading water was my favorite part of the final tests. Far from being a challenge to exert as much energy and strength as possible, treading water was a challenge to conserve energy as much as possible, to slow down, to rest and let the water support you.

By contrast, we live in a society that values energy and strength, speed and power. Keep up, or you risk losing out. Fight the deluge that assumes your disposability, or you risk drowning in it.

In 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 1 in 3 American adults do not get enough sleep for physical health and mental well-being. Lack of healthy sleep was disproportionately prevalent in the lives of indigenous and Black Americans.

The recent end to the eviction moratorium and the lapsed federal support for unemployment insurance puts 20 million people at risk of not having a place to sleep at all – let alone sleep well – according to the Covid-19 Eviction Defense Project.

Rest and well-being are privileges reserved for the few in our society.

Even in the work of justice. The resistance of unjust social structures can easily, temptingly, even logically assume the same conditions as those structures: testing exertion and requiring multi-tasking, calling for both urgency and endurance, leveraging power and speed, matching the pace of injustice with the pace of organizing. In the name of God and for the sake of one another, we rally to the cry that nothing less than 110% is acceptable.

As Madeleine L'Engle writes in *Walking on Water*, “We have to be braver than we think we can be, because God is constantly calling us to be more than we are, to

see through the plastic sham to living, breathing reality. Earthbound as we are, even we can walk on water.”

The work of walking on water must be paired with a delight in treading water. In the New Testament, Peter was weary from a long night of wrestling against waves and wind in the disciples’ boat when Jesus invited him to take walk on water.

God knows, Jesus is no less demanding when we are tired than when we are well-rested. We may have the faith to walk on water, but we are not made from dust that can be sustained in hyperdrive.

The cry of justice can only be just when it is paired with an invitation to rest. To prioritize well-being as much as labor. To value rest alongside restlessness. To fight for healthy sleep as much as we fight for healthy work. To believe that none are expendable to satisfy the storm’s torment. To insist that water – that life – can work for those most vulnerable, not against them.

Reach out. Breathe.

Pull in. Breathe.

Kick. Breathe.

Rest.

Breathe.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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