

Sermon for Feb 2026
Burning Inside, Not Burning Out
Embodying Resilience

- Imbolc
 - sits awkwardly between deep winter and obvious spring
 - Nothing looks resolved yet
 - world is changing in places no one can see
 - time of persistence before proof
 - Seeds swelling underground
 - doing crucial work invisibly
 - Lactation beginning before lambs are born
 - nourishment prepared in advance of need
 - Fire not as blaze, but as banked coals
 - kept alive through winter
 - Movements, like seasons, have winters
 - Winter work matters
 - People resisting sometimes despair that nothing is working
 - Imbolc says, "this is not failure; this is just the slow part"
- Resilience: Strength in what is small and hidden
 - Resilience is not the loud part
 - Often doesn't look like marching or chanting
 - Sometimes looks like continuing to exist, care, hope
 - even when world gives no immediate feedback
 - Not all resistance is confrontational
 - forms of resistance that don't make headlines
 - but make movements survivable
 - Mutual aid, rest, tending relationships, learning skills, staying morally awake
 - Embodying resilience
 - In addition to resisting unjust laws, systems, or leaders
 - Resist demands to disconnect from our bodies
 - Stay present instead of dissociating
 - Systems of power try to set the tempo
 - constantly breaking news

- moral emergencies
 - rapid-response outrage
 - Match that pace indefinitely, and you'll burn out
 - Breathing is a refusal of imposed tempo
 - When you can breathe, you can think
 - When you can think, you can choose
 - When you can choose, you remain human
 - Nervous system as battleground
 - fear vs regulation
 - panic vs grounded action
 - A body that can rest is harder to control than one constantly afraid
 - Rest is not acceptance
 - Fatigue is feedback, not failure
 - sign of caring, not weakness
 - happens from giving energy, attention, or love for something that matters deeply
 - giving outpaces replenishing
 - Indifference, apathy don't exhaust themselves
 - *We* tire because we care
 - Does **not** mean:
 - Not tough enough
 - Not radical enough
 - Not disciplined enough
 - Not spiritually strong enough
 - Retreat is sometimes part of advance
- Communal resilience
 - Resistance collapses when we believe we must be heroic alone
 - Danger of martyrdom culture
 - Resilience is distributed property of community
 - Sacredness of saying "I can't today" and being answered with "Then rest"
 - "I will carry this with you"
 - No single flame lights the world

- But many small flames prevent total darkness

Stories:

- Demeter (goddess of grain/harvest)
 - Persephone, daughter of Demeter, is gathering flowers when the earth opens and Hades takes her into the underworld
 - Demeter hears her daughter's cry. She searches everywhere—across land and sea. She refuses to eat. She refuses to rest. She carries torches and wanders the world in grief.
 - Zeus (her father) has consented to the abduction
 - No one tells Demeter
 - When she learns what has happened, she:
 - does not storm Olympus
 - does not plead
 - does not accept
 - simply withdraws her gift
 - Crops fail. Seeds do not sprout. The earth grows cold. Humanity begins to starve.
 - It is not that Demeter *can* not grow grain.
 - It is that she *will* not.
 - Compromise
 - Persephone will spend part of the year below, part above
 - When she returns, Demeter allows the earth to bloom again
 - Seasons result
 - Demeter's grief is not quiet
 - She does not accept what has been done
 - She does not “trust the process”
 - She withdraws her gifts
 - Winter happens because she refuses to cooperate
 - with injustice
 - with a system that treats her daughter as expendable.
 - Demeter does not break the world
 - Reveals what the world depends on

- The gods intervene when
 - Crops fail
 - Humans starve
 - Sacrifice ceases
 - i.e. when normal operations are disrupted
 - Power ignores grief until grief interrupts the economy
- Her resilience is not passive endurance
 - It's sustained refusal
 - It's not cheerfulness
 - It is moral clarity
- Demeter embodies the moment when love says “No”
 - to harm
 - to abduction
 - to the casual use of power
- Her winter is not weakness
 - It's protest
 - Anger and grief are sacred
- Burning Inside, Not Burning Out
 - Righteous refusal can turn into self-consuming fire
 - How do we hold onto Demeter’s moral clarity without letting the world freeze—or ourselves collapse?
 - Winter, left untended, can become total
 - Demeter’s refusal nearly destroys everything
 - including what she loves
 - Imbolc does not end Demeter’s winter
 - marks the moment when the ground remembers what it is capable of
 - soil is still cold
 - loss is still real
 - And yet—something stirs
- Brigid: poetry, smithcraft, and healing
 - Brigid as embodied resilience
 - Fire
 - inspiration, justice, refusal to go numb
 - Water

- healing, grief, adaptability
- Craft
 - skill, patience, repetition
- It's not just endurance—it's *skillful* endurance
 - Fire that warms without burning out
 - Water that yields but also erodes stone
 - Craft as resistance
 - doing something well and carefully
 - in a culture of haste and harm
- Authoritarian systems depend on exhaustion and despair
 - Craft, beauty, and care are not distractions from resistance—they are counter-practices
- famous perpetual flame associated with Saint Brigid
 - 5th–6th century
 - Medieval Ireland, Church of the Oak in Kildare
 - Flame kept by a community of women (nuns)
 - Tended in rotation—tradition says 19 women, with Brigid herself tending it on the 20th day
 - Burned continuously and was not allowed to go out
 - Burned without being diminished
- No written Pagan myth
 - Scholars believe sacred fire has pre-Christian roots
 - Before Saint Brigid, there was the goddess Brigid
 - Fire symbolism fits her domains
 - The forge (craft)
 - The poetic spark (inspiration)
 - Hearth fire (domestic protection)
 - when Xianity arrived, sacred women of Kildare inherited the fire of the goddess
- Her flame is described as
 - Contained
 - Guarded
 - Sustained
 - Communal
 - Not wildfire, but hearth-fire

- Brigid's fire symbolizes:
 - Continuity
 - Inspiration
 - Protection
 - Sacred presence
 - Brigid's fire is not
 - conquest
 - spectacle
 - martyrdom
 - exhaustion
 - It is disciplined, sustainable devotion
 - Brigid's fire at Imbolc
 - does not try to melt the whole winter in one night
 - It says
 - Spring will come
 - But tonight, we keep each other warm
 - Fire that survives Winter
- Braiding Stories
 - Demeter is the winter we create when we refuse injustice
 - Brigid is the flame we keep so refusal does not destroy us
 - Demeter teaches that grief can change the world
 - Brigid teaches that tending can sustain the griever
 - Demeter is the power to withdraw life
 - Brigid is the power to bank the coals
 - Demeter shows us when to say no
 - Brigid teaches us how to endure
- Demeter shows us that change cannot be undone
 - Persephone returns, but not fully
 - The world does not go back to "before"
 - Justice is partial
 - Loss leaves a mark
 - Seasons are the scar of grief
 - Demeter doesn't "get over it"
 - She learns to live with what cannot be undone
 - Resilience here is adaptation, not erasure

- It's the rhythm between fierce refusal and careful tending
- Embodied Application
 - Demeter lives
 - in our anger, our “enough” when harm is normalized
 - in exhaustion of refusing to accept “this is how things are”
 - She lives in every person who steps back rather than participate in injustice
 - Brigid lives in our breath, our rest, our craft
 - Demeter disrupts systems
 - Brigid sustains people
 - If we live only in Demeter, we burn out
 - If we live only in Brigid, we may adapt to what should not be tolerated
 - Hold the burning inside, but don't burn out
- Closing
 - Imbolc sits at the seasonal hinge
 - Winter has not ended
 - Spring has not arrived
 - Demeter is still negotiating
 - Brigid is still tending
 - Demeter and Brigid sit on opposite sides of the same threshold
 - one embodies the refusal that creates winter
 - the other embodies the fire that survives within it
 - we need to find both within ourselves
 - We are allowed to be winter
 - We are required to keep the fire
 - Let your grief refuse what harms the world
 - Let your inner flame keep you human while you do
- Resilience
 - Is not
 - Endless endurance
 - Emotional numbness
 - Winning at all costs
 - Sacrificing ourselves to prove a point
 - Is

- Staying human
 - Staying connected
 - Staying capable of love and anger at the same time
 - At Imbolc, we do not ask whether spring is guaranteed We ask only whether we will keep the fire alive long enough to meet it
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- Embodied Resilience Practice
 - Place a hand on your chest and feel warmth and breath
 - Focus on “what is quietly growing in me”
 - Demeter’s grief constricts the world into winter
 - Brigid’s fire warms it
 - Breath is the small inner fire
 - Not a blaze, but a coal
 - Take a deep breath
 - counteracts the body language of defeat
 - doesn’t solve injustice
 - keeps you from collapsing under it