

Day of Pentecost Sunday Sermon
Pr. Tamika Jancewicz
DEMD Synod Online Worship Service
John 20:19-23 and Acts 2:1-21

What does it mean to breathe?

When we inhale we bring in oxygen, and when we exhale we release carbon dioxide. Breathing in and out rejuvenates our cells and gives us the energy to sustain our life force. To breathe is to be alive. When we take deep breaths in, it can be calming, soothing, and relaxing. When we exhale out with intentions it can be cooling, releasing, and freeing.

Lately, breathing around other people seems almost dangerous in some settings. Honestly, the idea of being too close to anyone except for my relatives and close loved ones gives me a little bit of anxiety. And I find myself hoping that when I'm in public spaces that everyone would keep their masks on at all times and stand six feet apart. Always. Even if I crave closeness.

And in some ways, I have become more intimately attune with my breath. Behind my mask, I can feel my breath leaving my mouth or nose and touching the fabric. And admittedly, I hold my breath if I feel like I'm too close to someone I don't know even sometimes if they have their mask on, but definitely, if they don't.

So I'm noticing more when I feel free to breathe and when I do not.

In our gospel reading this morning, we find ourselves back in that locked room, afraid with the disciples, remembering once more how Jesus showed up extending peace, looking on his beloved in their fear and offering up something with his own breath, the Spirit, the blessed disruptive, holy spirit, that was promised to be there to comfort and advocate with and for them.

I'm curious about that particular moment when Jesus breathed on them. The fear and anxiety must have been thick in the air they were all breathing in. I wonder how many of them had racing hearts and shallow breaths before Jesus showed up. And at the same time when Jesus breathed on them, did they breathe in his breath? Was it calming, soothing, and relaxing? Did they exhale a sigh of relief just for that moment to be free from this looming and present fear of death? How did it feel to receive the Holy Spirit at that moment? Was their breath warm and fuller, did they feel empowered, held, cared for, protected? Was it a collective breath that gave them the insight and wisdom they would need for the journey ahead of them? Did they feel more alive at this moment with the breath of the Holy Spirit in them?

This moment with Jesus, in particular, reminds us that the breath is a sacred thing. This closeness and the collective nature of Jesus' breathing on his beloved is becoming less and less familiar these days, but the sacredness of it is not. Breathing in the holy especially when

fear is permeating the atmosphere is the gift that Jesus gives to his disciples and a gift that we too receive.

The breath, this holy and sacred breath, is the very thing that keeps us alive. Our lungs fill up and expand, our brain continues to work, and our hearts continue to beat. We share the air as we breathe.

And, yet, we have witnessed time and time again how in an instance this sacred breath can be taken from a person by another without regard to the sanctity of their humanity.

George Floyd pleaded for his sacred breath while being detained by police officers, and echoes of another beloved saint, Eric Garner who cried the same plea re-inflicted the painful wounds of the sin of racism that continues to tell us black people that our lives are not valued in this system of white supremacy. And the voices filled with anguish, exhaustion, and anger from the collective breath of black people, and accomplices alike, has been filling newsfeeds across social media platforms.

And in the uprising of weary hearts and spirits, the sacred collective breath of people starts in the streets of Minneapolis expanding around our country, disrupting the very sin and evil that tries to obstruct the sacred and holy breath of justice and a call to repentance.

Yes, the breath is a sacred thing

And despite what the isms tell us, this sacredness is not exclusive and it should not be a privilege. We heard this earlier in the telling of the Acts of the Apostles by Pr. Jason Chesnut. People were gathered to celebrate the Jewish festival of the spring harvest and the revelation of the law at Mt Sinai and what happened there should not be dismissed as a mere phantasm, but the real working of the holy spirit as she came upon them with no discrimination as to who the message was for and where it would come from. It was for any and everyone who would listen, who would hear, and speak.

Each one speaking in the native tongues of the nations present. In their sacred and collective breath, they spoke of the power and deeds of G-d, mystifying those who heard this powerful message in whatever language of their ancestors.

And of course, there were skeptics. People who wanted to know what happened *before* this thing occurred. They came with their accusations because, well, it didn't quite fit their understanding of Galileans, if you know what I mean?

But that didn't deter Peter from sharing the good news and neither should it deter us.

Peter speaks aloud the sacredness and sanctity of the holy breath and how the Spirit will choose whom she will choose. This Spirit, the holy breath that comes to speak life, will cross all

boundaries, all gender norms, all binaries, all ages, all economic statuses, all systems of oppression, and through all aspects of the atmosphere to connect with us and tell us the truth.

And perhaps that's also what it means to breathe.

Alongside the scientific explanation of how our body works, to breathe with The Spirit also means to be open and available to tell and receive the truth. There is courage in this breathing because it dares to believe that the sacredness and sanctity of life are for all, and belongs to everyone. It's to believe that G-d is in all and works through all.

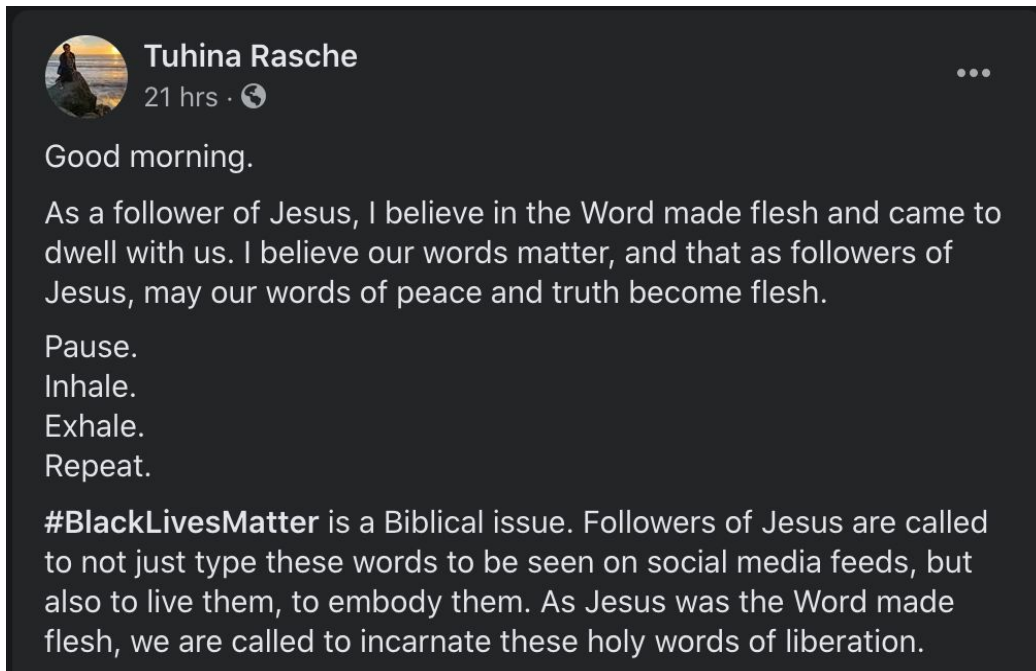
To breathe in this holy understanding of living as G-d's people also means we do not stand for the injustice that tells us otherwise. That's where the courage comes in. This breath doesn't stay silent when there is a fire in our bones, it speaks up and tells the truth. It trusts that the Spirit will utter the words as we inhale what is blessed and holy, and exhale and release anything that is not life-giving and affirming. This breathing sustains us in what is true. It encourages us in what is possible. It not only shows us that we're alive, but that our neighbor should also be alive. No one should die in this collective breath, especially a death done by the hands of systems that cause division, hierarchy, and dehumanization.

That, beloved, is what it means to breathe. Together.

I'm grateful for my dear friend and colleague, Pr. Tuhina Rasche whose encouraging words voice this collective act of breathing with the Spirit of truth.

Back in March when the realities of the pandemic got really real for us in this country, I remember Pr. Tuhina started sharing posts that she said were reminders she needed to hear, and it often resonated with so many people who would comment on those posts, including myself. In each post, she would write a reminder to pause, inhale and exhale and repeat. Then sometimes leave us with a thought to keep in mind for the day.

Her latest post reads:



We are called to incarnate these holy words of liberation.

Yes, beloved, this is what it means to breathe together.

This is the time to join our collective breath and to fully embody what G-d continues to show us, that our liberation, our lives are connected. Not just connected but entangled. My liberation is tied to yours. When we look at one another we should see the reflection of the divine, no one is exempt from receiving this divine image. And our words, our actions, our breathing should reflect that and how we value each other.

And so let us breathe together this day and let the Holy Spirit fill us with a lament for our brokenness, a hope for G-d's justice to prevail, and a loving peace that extends towards one another not away.

Let's Pause

Inhale

Exhale

Repeat.

Amen.