

April 2, 2023
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 21:1-11

Our speaking depends on our breathing.

We must take a breath in (inhale)

Before the breath can go out and be any kind of word.

We breathe in and as we breathe out

The air goes over our vocal cords

And it is shaped by our mouth, teeth, and tongue.

The air turns into a shout, a whisper, a song

Breathe is necessary for us to speak

To pray, to conspire, to deny, to curse and plead and weep.

It is the breath that allows us to speak.

And the breath of God spoke in the beginning

It created life.

The Word of God is how everything was made.

And that Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Word that is Jesus.

And with his words, he stilled the storms and cast out demons

With only his words, Jesus healed people and gave them new life.

He spoke the truth to them and it set them free from slavery and sin.

Jesus came to set the world free.

And today, he marches into Jerusalem in a victory parade.

First, Jesus asks the disciples to find him a donkey.

On a donkey, he will make his triumphal entry.

On a donkey, he will ride into the city.

On a donkey, like King Solomon and King David before him.

The donkey is a sign of humility.

It is the sign of the king.

It is the sign that he is God's chosen coming to rule his people.

The disciples are beyond excited.

The breath is quick and sharp. Their words stutter over one another.

"Come on! Let's Go. Let's find the donkey. Look! Over here!

Here's one. Should we take it? Yes, I think so. Untie it and let's go!"

"Excuse me." The air stands still.

"What do you think you are doing with my donkey?"

(Ahem) (big breath) "Well, the Lord has need of it."

Oh. Well, of course. Go ahead. (whew)

(whisper) "Should we take the foal too? Yes, I suppose. Might as well."

Flushed and breathing hard, the disciples return.

Alright, Jesus. Here we are.

One, two, three, LIFT. Jesus is on board.

Everyone takes a deep breath. Here goes nothing.

They move out toward Jerusalem and a breeze stirs the air.

People begin to notice.
They gather; they begin to follow Jesus.
Some are waving palm branches.
Some are putting down coats like a red carpet.
More people come. The parade buzzes like bees.
It rumbles like a bank of clouds
Steadily they take up the chant: Hosanna! Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

The people are hopeful. They are taking this chance.
Before Herod, before all the Romans.
They have nothing left to lose: the poor, the least and last.
Waving palms branches for their king as they march into the city.
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
It is a victory chant. A ticker tape parade.
The words of the prophets echo on the breeze.:
“Look your king comes; mounted on a donkey”

People inside the city begin to notice and wonder:
“Who is this?” they ask.
There is an air of curiosity. And skepticism.

“Who is this?” “What is he doing?”

“Is there something he is trying to prove?”

Is this a protest? A demonstration?

An uprising that will result in people getting killed?

There are huffs of annoyance and displeasure. (humph)

Who is this?

It’s Jesus. The prophet, some reply.

Don’t you know? The one from Nazareth of Galilee.

Nazareth of Galilee? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?

Some scoff and sneer. Some watch, holding their breath.

Some sigh in disapproval.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the religious leaders,

They exhale a ragged breath.

They have no time for this. Not during the Passover.

Not with all things going on and the people in town

All the tension and fear with Rome watching and breathing down their
necks,

Waiting for any chance to come down hard.

The Pharisees and elders complain.

“By what authority does he do these things?”

He should keep quiet. He should know his place.

But even if the crowds were silent, the rocks would cry out.

The very earth itself would sing.

Everything that has breath would praise the Lord.
The Pharisees hiss: this has gone on long enough.
Something must be done.

Later on, Jesus gathers with his friends in an upper room.
They are celebrate the Passover, the meal of remembrance;
When the Angel of death passed over and delivered them from slavery in
Egypt.
They pray and sing. They remember their covenant with God.
“Remember, Jesus says. Remember this meal. Remember this night.
Remember what I have taught you.
To love one another as I have loved you.
Here, take this. Eat it. It is my body.
Take this and drink from it, all of you. It is my blood.
Remember. Remember who I am.
Because one of you is about to betray me.”
All the air has gone out of the room.
The disciples gasp in shock.
What? Why? Who would do such a thing?
Surely not I? Lord, surely not I?
They breathe unevenly with alarm and suspicion.
Judas slips out the door to collect his 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus needs fresh air. They all need fresh air.
They go to the garden of Gethsemane.
Jesus knows what is about to happen. He needs to pray.
His heart and mind are filled with sorrow.
“Let this cup pass from me.”
He pleads. He weeps with his breath full of sobs.
“But not what I want God; (sigh) what you want.”
Jesus goes to find the disciples.
They are breathing steadily in their sleep.
Get up, he says. It is time to go.

On the wind come shouts and angry voices.
Soldiers have arrived.
And look, it's Judas who has shown them the way.
They have an order for Jesus' arrest.
Treachery and deceit hang in the air.
Fear, terror. The disciples flee. Jesus is left alone.
He is brought before the religious court.
The accusations fly. Their words are full of contempt.
Blasphemy. Treason. Guilty.
Then it's Herod's turn. Disdain. Condescension.
Then it's Pilate's turn. Pity. Scorn. Dismissal.
There are no kind words for Jesus; only rejection.

Even Peter, his friend, has denied knowing him.
Jesus is turned over to the Roman soldiers.
They mock him and curse him.
Their words are like the whip the scourges his body.
Their ridicule is as sharp as the crown of thorns they shove on his head.
But Jesus says nothing. Not a word.
His breath is a silent sentinel.
Finally, Pilate announces his judgment.
He says Jesus is innocent.
It should be the last word. But the crowd outside shouts and screams.
They want blood. They want violence.
Pilate washes his hands of it.
He cannot change the way the wind is blowing.
What should I do with your King?, he asks the angry mob.
Together they drawn in their breath and shout: CRUCIFY HIM.
CRUCIFY HIM.
And they take Jesus away to be crucified.

Carrying his cross, every breath is pain.
Nailed to the cross, each breath is agony.
Every noise is a cry of suffering.
But Jesus is not alone.
He is surrounded by other criminals, by soldiers and on-lookers.

“Forgive them, Father,” he rasps. “For they know not what they do.”

Hours pass. Darkness falls. The air is still.

Jesus lifts his voice in lament.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The words hang in the air.

And Jesus breathes his last. He hands himself over to God.

There is no more in him to give.

And the heart of God breaks in two and the earth shudders with grief.

The Roman soldier watching sighs heavily:

“Surely this was God’s son.”

The truth. The truth of it all comes out at last.

The words that the world had been waiting to hear.

At the start of the week, the air was filled with praise and joy.

By the end of it, the air is filled with hatred, anger and emptiness.

In the space of a breath, it seems. In such a short time.

And how quickly the human heart changes.

How quickly our spirits falter.

How quickly we forget to breath.

To remember where our breath comes from and where it will go.

Instead we fall from light into darkness.

From love into hate. From compassion to indifference.

The speed of it takes your breath away.

The power of fear. The rush to judgment.
The scape-goating, the blame shifting.
The willingness to create a monster where a human being once stood.
And there's nothing that we can do to stop it.

The Word has left us.
And along with it, the hope and joy and possibility of anything.
All we have is the thin air remaining to us.
The breath in our own lungs and our choice to use it or not.
What will we do? What will we say?
Will we add to the anger and hatred?
Will our breath become words of ridicule and rejection?
Will our voices carry on the noise of destruction and cruelty?
Or will we remember mercy? Will we remember grace?
Will our words echo the Word of God?
And the truth that he spoke and the healing that he gave.
And the good news that love will win; and that it will triumph over
everything.
That it will ride into our hearts on a humble little donkey
And comfort us and restore us and never leave us alone.
With our breath with breath in and out
And with our voice we lift the hosanna of this day.

As a prayer, as a cry, as a shield against the hatred that would shout us down.

We inhale God's spirit and life and the words form

And our voices lift above it all:

Hosanna. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.