

Palm Sunday
The Passion according to St. Luke
St. Luke 13:1-9
April 14, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Just Breathe

“And Jesus breathed his last.”

Palm Sunday is our traditional name for this day. For the last forty years, the church has dubbed it Passion Sunday. It is a day that begins with Jesus very much alive and breathing and ends up with Jesus breathing His last. An emotional roller coaster. Passion Sunday combines the elements of Holy Week that follows in a wise move by the liturgical leaders of our church, anticipating that our busy lives would preclude many from attending the Holy Week Services which track these events. So how do you get from Lent, from a Palm Sunday Parade to Easter if you haven't lived through Holy Week? So here it is, wrapped up in one day, one service, to prepare you for the coming of our central day next Sunday when we proclaim the good news of Christ Risen from the grave.

The Passion of God, which is what today and this coming week, are all about reminds us of the passion with which God Loves you and me. God is extremely passionate about us because God loves us. God is willing to suffer and die for us. And this is no ordinary suffering. This suffering is extremely physical and extremely mental and emotional. We know how Jesus is beaten and whipped to within an inch of his life, even having thorns driven into his head and huge nails in his wrists and feet, but he is humiliated, mocked and abandoned by everyone, left to die alone on a cross.

Jesus slowly suffocated while hanging on the cross. [At this point, I would ask you to stand and stretch your arms toward the ceiling, if you can, as high as you can reach. Hold that position, and now try to breathe. You will note your diaphragm is frozen and impaired, making breathing difficult and labored. This is what Jesus experienced as his weight hung from the cross, and this is how he slowly died, suffocating, losing his ability to breathe.]

We go from festive palm branches displaying our passionate parade to follow Jesus into Jerusalem to God's passion for us. As you hold your palms today, remember this passion, from a parade to a cross for you, from the lovely green branches to the

grey, dark bloody body held by His Mother on Friday evening. Seeming triumph to seeming defeat. But nothing but passionate love.

“And Jesus breathed his last.”

Breath is the measure of our lives. When we are born, we take our first breath when we come out of the womb. Day by day, thousands of times a day, our breathing sustains us. In and Out. In and Out. And then we take our last breath, and we die to this mortal life, which has depended upon our breathing. Stop breathing for more than five minutes, and you will be dead. But we know these things.

Our breathing in and out and the air we breathe are the gift of life. Breathing sustains us. The air is the life force going in and out of us that animates our mortal bodies. Every creature that lives upon this earth in some fashion breathes in and breathes out. Even the fish breathe in the oxygen from the water around them through their gills. Even the trees breathe, giving off precious oxygen for us.

Each breath is the same: in and out. Breathing happens most of the time without our knowledge. It is an automatic function like our heartbeat controlled by our brains. We don't need to think about breathing, but it will happen. But we can think about it. We can be mindful about it. When we do so, we open ourselves to a spiritual place that we do not normally access when living so hurriedly and busily. We can be mindful of our breathing in and our breathing out. When we do so, we are doing what many call meditation, and the simple act of being mindful about our breathing has a wonderful calming effect if nothing else. Remember those words spoken when someone is anxious and excited? “Just take a breath and calm yourself down before you continue.”

God for a time breathed the air we breathe. God who is in the air we breathe, became one of us and breathed with us. When we are mindful of our breathing we become mindful of the gift of life from God. When we are mindful of our breathing we become close to God who breathed life into us and into all of creation.

This past Lent we have read the Psalms prayerfully on Sunday mornings, being mindful of our breathing. We call this the Monastic style of reading the Psalms because that is how monks read them: a breath drawn in and exhaled at the beginning of each verse and in the mid—verse at the asterisk. As they mindfully breathe in they recall the Spirit of God who utters these words down through the centuries. As they exhale, they exhale these words into our world in this moment to be heard once again. And the words of the Psalms are said to be the words of the

Word, spoken to humanity. The words of the living God. The words of the Word of God, Jesus.

Breathe in. Breath out. Every breath we take we inhale God and we exhale that which we cannot contain in our bodies. Breath: the gift of life we witness in a new baby. The rhythm of life that we live. The Spirit of God all around us, passionately protecting us, passionately animating us.

“And Jesus breathed his last.” AMEN