

John 14:15-21 – Preached on April 27, 2008

¹⁵”If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸”I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Breath. God’s breath. Ruah. The breath of God. Ruah...the word used in the Old Testament for the breath of God. Breath. Ruah...the word used in the Old Testament for the Spirit of God.

Ruah. If you say it enough times, it begins to sound like breath that is being let out. Ruah.

The breath of God and the Spirit of God are one and the same. It is the breath of God that hovered over the waters in the beginning of creation. Genesis 1...the very beginning of the creation story...says, “...darkness covered the face of the deep, while a breath from God said, ‘let there be light’ and there was light.” It was the breath of God that spoke light and darkness into being.

I invite you to listen for a moment as I read an excerpt from *The Magician’s Nephew*, which is a part of the *Chronicles of Narnia* series written by C.S. Lewis. Some of the characters have just arrived in another land, but they cannot figure out where they are, which is where we begin the reading,

“In the darkness there was something happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away...it seemed to come from all directions at once. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.

Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by the other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn’t come out gently one by one...one moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leapt out – single stars, constellations, and planets.

The Singer turned out to be a lion. Its mouth was wide open in song and it was about three hundred yards away. As the lion walked and sang, the valley grew green with grass. In all

directions the land was swelling into humps. They were of very different sizes, some no bigger than molehills, some as big as wheelbarrows, two the size of cottages. And the humps moved and swelled till they burst, and from each hump there came out an animal.

The moles came out...the dogs came out...the frogs went straight into the river...the greatest moment of all was when the biggest hump broke like a small earthquake and out came the sloping back, the large wise head, and the four baggy-trousered legs of an elephant. And now you could hardly hear the song of the Lion; there was so much cawing, cooing, barking, bleating, and trumpeting.

All the creatures the lion had touched stood in a circle around him. The lion, whose eyes never blinked, stared at the animals as hard as if he was going to burn them up with his mere stare. The lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways a line of trees.

Then came the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard was saying, "Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters. It was of course, the lion's voice."

For me, this is one of the most beautiful descriptions of the breath of God, the ruah who created every living thing.

And it is the breath of God that sustains creation in this generation, on this day. Psalm 104 gives us a picture of this creation that is held in God's hands, "When you hide your face, creation is dismayed...when you take away creation's breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your breath, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."

We see that now, in this time of renewal of the ground. Spring is upon us. The flowers are starting to bloom. For the last week, I have been watching a tulip begin to bloom outside of the office window. First the leaves came up out of the ground and then the stem of the flower appeared. On Thursday, the bud started to open, and I saw just a glimmer of red color inside. I see God's renewing breath in that tulip.

It is the breath of God that breathed life into humans. Genesis 2 says, "...the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." To breathe is to be alive. To have breath...to breathe in and out...is testament that God first breathed life into us. We take on average 17,280 breaths a day. That is 17,280 times that we can remember who created us and who first gave us life.

In the New Testament, it is Jesus who tells us about the breath of God, about God's Spirit. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus tells his disciples that soon another being will come to them, one

that will advocate for them and one that will be with them forever. This is the Holy Spirit, the ruah, the breath that created the beginnings of the earth.

It's like a breath of new life for these disciples who have been through so much in their time with Jesus. They have been in danger. They have traveled many miles. They have argued with each other and have questioned Jesus. They have misunderstood many things. And I am sure they are tired. And on top of all of that, Jesus is now telling them that he is going to leave.

I can just see those disciples gathered around Jesus, hearing this news and taking it in. Jesus tells them this right before he's about to be arrested, which will eventually lead to his crucifixion and death. But right now, all those disciples know is that Jesus is going to leave. Maybe some of them took a deep breath and let it out...a breath that turned into a sigh. Maybe some of them took a deep breath and held it for a moment...to stop from saying something. Maybe some of them took a deep breath and let it out, and did it again...to stop themselves from getting too worked up.

Goodbyes are very difficult. Many of us have experienced some form of a goodbye in our lives. Children grow up and go to college or move away. We have to move to another town because of a job or family need and must say goodbye to friends or family. We change jobs and have to say goodbye to our coworkers. We say goodbye to loved ones when they die...and this includes family pets. When we're in school, we move from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. And with that comes goodbyes to former teachers and staff.

And with all those goodbyes we can understand a bit about what those disciples experienced. About why they caught their breath in surprise or tried to take deep breaths to stop from crying. And that's why it is so profound that Jesus tells them that he is not going to leave them completely, that he will not leave them orphaned.

Whatever breath of shock and sadness those disciples let out, Jesus promised that the Spirit, the ruah, the breath of God, would fill them up again.

That same breath that breathed over the waters of creation. That same breath that created Adam. That same breath that gives life to that tulip outside of my office window.

That breath was now going to be with each one of the disciples. And not just once or for a few minutes. But forever. And not just as a spooky spirit that hovered around. But in each one of them. Jesus was with each one of them during his time on earth, but the breath of God would be IN each one of them...God's Spirit would be IN them, wherever they went and whatever they experienced.

And Jesus' words to his disciples are for us, too. We are promised that the Spirit, the ruah, the breath of God, will fill us up again. When we are in shock because of bad news. When we cry so hard that we can't catch our breath. When our own breaths become shorter and faster

because of something that's making us nervous. When our own breath becomes strained because of anger or frustration.

The Spirit will fill us up again. The breath of God will become our own breath, helping us to fill our lungs with grace and mercy and courage rather than fear and anger and sorrow.

We can leave here this morning, knowing that whenever we need it, God's breath, God's spirit, will work through us. It's almost as if that lion we heard about in the beginning of the sermon, who symbolizes God's spirit, comes to us each morning and breathes that long, warm breath on each one of us...giving us the grace and strength to greet the day.

May you leave here taking a deep breath and knowing that your breath and God's breath are one and the same...remembering the promise that Jesus gives, "you are in me, and I am in you."
Amen.