

**Sermon: Time to Exhale    Text: John 2:13-22    January 16 2022**  
**Rideau Park United Church    Rev. Steve Clifton**

You know you are doing it right now. And you don't even have to think about it. You do it all the time, from birth until death. You do it 16 times a minute, 23000 times a day.

Rhythmically. Involuntarily. In and out. Out and In. You're breathing.

Breathing is essential to life. When you breathe you take in what is life giving and blow out what is no longer life giving

Take a moment to think about your breathing. Try taking a deep breath. Now without exhaling, breathe in again...Doesn't work very well. If we want to breathe in new air, we first have to breathe out the old. If we are going to take in new life-giving oxygen, we first have to get rid of the stale old air that is already taking up space in our lungs.

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Breath is a holy thing. It gives us life. In the Hebrew tradition breath is of God. From the second Creation story in Genesis, we read: *Then the LORD God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and the human being became a living being.*

Breath, in our tradition is God's life giving gift. A common word in Hebrew, translated sometimes as *breath*, can also be read as *spirit*. The breath of God. The spirit of God.

Breath gives life. God's spirit gives life. To breathe is to take in God's Spirit. To breathe is to be spirit filled, to be inspired - - inspired.

To take in the gift God gives we have to make room. We need to breathe out so we can breathe in.

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Breathing can be a spiritual practice. I read a story of a prison chaplain in a maximum-security prison in upper New York State. As you can imagine, the prisoners are filled with many negative thoughts and feelings. He has helped them a great deal by teaching them a breathing prayer. He has them sit quietly and has them breathe and pray, taking a few breaths with each part of the prayer.

- They blow out their anger and breathe in the peace of Christ.
- They breathe out despair and breathe in the hope of Jesus.
- They exhale, clearing out fear and replace the fear by breathing in the love of Jesus.
- This form of breathing prayer has helped the inmates to be rid of negative thoughts and feelings and to be filled with the life of Christ.

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In the gospel today Jesus forcefully, passionately exhales makes a space for God. Jesus removes the clutter. Jesus cleans things out.

Jesus comes to the Temple in Jerusalem and uses a whip to clear the moneychangers and merchants from God's House.

Its not that these business people were doing anything terribly wrong. They had a place in Temple life. They were useful. Necessary even.

The merchants sold the animals and birds that people needed if they were going to make sacrifices in the Temple. The money lenders had to be there so that worshippers from all over the ancient world could exchange their coins, usually Roman, for temple currency. In the Temple you could not use money that carried the image of a human King like Caesar. In the Temple only God was Sovereign.

The merchants and money changers had an essential role in Temple life. But they were also in the way. Taking up space. In the clutter, commerce, and busyness of the Temple courtyard there was little room for God. Some people saw only the transactions that made worship possible. The One they came to worship got lost. The merchants and their booths crowded God out. So, Jesus makes room. He forcefully clears out the space that was meant for God.

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In today's gospel Jesus makes space. Jesus acts with force and passion to clear out the things that get in between the people and their God. What would this passionate Jesus have is cast aside...clear out...exhale from our lives? In our personal life, our church's life, our national life, what is clutter? What would be best to simply exhale and leave behind?

Remember that what Jesus clears out is not necessarily evil or wrong. But the money traders are taking up space, they have become a distraction – so they have to go... What needs to be driven from our lives, our schedules, our minds, our hearts, in order to make room for God and the full life that God would have us live?

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We haven't chosen it, but 2 years of pandemic living have cleared somethings out. Once again, we are in partial lockdown. Omicron keeps us at home. Disrupts routines, Changes priorities

Early this week I had a close exposure to someone who tested positive for Covid so I have been isolating at home this week. My already limited life has become more so for a while.

The pandemic will end. That is to think about.

Are there any of our old routines now interrupted that we would just let go of forever. Are there things we are glad to have exhaled from our life? And what new things would be put in their place?

One of the consequences of the pandemic is shifts in the labour market\*. People who worked in service industries are not returning to their previous work. When things shut down and they could not do their jobs, when they had time on their hands, in the space the pandemic created they got in touch with things that had been lost in the busyness. They had worked long hours and now had free time. They felt the pain and fatigue in their bodies. They had space for reflection, for selfcare, for new training and education opportunities, time for family and relationships and leisure. In the space created by the pandemic shut down they filled their time with life giving things. They exhaled and inhaled, and life was better, and they have moved on. They have left their old life behind because in the space created by Covid they found a new and better life.

The life we knew in March 2020, when the pandemic hit, it's gone. We will not return to what was, the world has changed and there is good in that.

If there is any grace in this gloomy time maybe its in the creation of space, in time for reflection and learning and discovery. Perhaps we have learned what is most life giving for us. Maybe its something we miss from pre covid times that we want to recover or something we have found in covid time that we want to retain... And maybe we have learned what we would rather just let go of...exhale and make room for something new

Maybe the pandemic, a hard and heavy a time as it is, might also be a time of grace, a time to exhale, to clear out the clutter, to make room for the new that God would give.

Let Jesus show us the way. Watch as he cleans out the Temple to make room for the Holy, for the one who breathes new life into us. What takes up space in your life that Jesus would have you clear away? What are the life-giving things that Jesus would help you make room for...?

And as you breathe today, as you do, may the breath of God, Gods Spirit, fill you with hope and strength and new life.

May it be so.

AMEN

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\*Stories from the Great American Labour Shortage: New York Times- The Daily  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/27/podcasts/the-daily/labor-shortages-pandemic-hospitality.html>