

Epiphany 3C
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
The Rev. Dr. Janet Lombardo
January 26, 2025

Breathe

Well, here we are, Annual Meeting Sunday Part 2! Today is Good Shepherd's turn, though I think it is unlikely they will be shorter than St James!

We have so many things to be thankful for, so many things to celebrate. I just want to remind us of that, after all the craziness hear and see in the news. To some, the sky is falling, to others it is a long overdue course correction. Wherever you may fall on that continuum, I just want to remind you that those on the other end of that continuum are not the enemy. We have a tendency to vilify anyone who thinks differently than we do. We have a tendency to threaten or even attack anyone who does not get in line. This is not healthy.

The Episcopal Bishop of Washington, DC preached this week at the National Cathedral. You may have heard about it. Bishop Mariann Budde rather directly asked the President to consider mercy in his decisions. She named those who are most afraid of his policies and asked him to be merciful. Mercy is a time-honored Christian perspective, maybe even a perspective of all religions. Bishop Budde did not chastise the President, she simply asked him, in the name of a loving God, to be merciful.

As Christians, it is our responsibility always to seek justice and to act with mercy. Now sometimes there are situations where mercy may be tempered by the needs or concerns of others, or even the needs of a government. That being said, acting with mercy is never a bad thing. It is good for us to remember that, until we have walked in someone else's shoes, it is hard to know what choices they made to end up where they are.

Mercy, like empathy, allows forgiveness and caring to enter our thoughts and influence our decisions. I think that Bishop Budde was very brave, and I know how hard it is sometimes to preach the word of God. I am deeply troubled that, because of her words, she has been threatened. We need to open

our ears and our hearts to hear the truth of God's word, even when it may make us a bit, or even a lot, uncomfortable. Vilifying the preacher does not change the fact that mercy is found throughout the scriptures. We have lost so much civility in our society, and we vilify and devalue so many people. We forget that we are all part of one body, that we all have something to contribute, that we are all needed.

Corinthians reminds us of that this morning – that each part of the body is important, essential to our health and well-being. That we all have a role to play, that we are all God's beloved. That we are all part of God's body here on earth, and that we are all different. God made us different – thanks be to God! This world would be pretty boring if we were all the same. So let us celebrate our differences as the fullest expression of God's body on earth.

I want us to all take a breath. I mean, a really big breath that goes all the way down to your belly. Hold it a minute, then let it go slowly. I think that if we all did this before we spoke, the world would be a better place. Jesus demonstrates this to us in this morning's reading. First, he is handed a scroll. He unrolls it. Now this is not a quick process to unroll a scroll, it's not like flipping pages, it is a process. Breathe. Jesus reads the scripture. Breathe. He rolls up the scroll. Breathe. Jesus sits down. Breathe. All look at him. Breathe. Jesus speaks. This is something we need to practice over and over. Breathing. I know we do it every day all day, but we take it for granted. We think that everything needs to be done yesterday, we think we can't pause. It is our culture, it is our society. I am asking everyone to take a breath. We will not manage these next few weeks without remembering to breathe.

Sometimes I feel that this world has too many talkers and not enough listeners. I say this as an extrovert and preacher! Breathing allows us to pause, breathing allows us to listen, breathing allows us to think. Breathing allows us to hear Jesus' words this morning, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Let those words sink in and do not fear. Breathe. Amen