

Elizabeth Propst:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Elizabeth Propst:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. Our speaker this morning is Isabel Galleymore. Please rise, as you're able, and join me in our responsive reading, which is number 39 in your black Appleton psalter.

I said, I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. I will keep a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence.

Congregation:

I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew worse.

Elizabeth Propst:

My heart became hot within me. While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:

Congregation:

"LORD, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.

Elizabeth Propst:

You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath."

Congregation:

Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

Elizabeth Propst:

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry. Do not hold your peace at my tears.

Congregation:

For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears.

Elizabeth Propst:

Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again before I depart, and am no more.

Choir:

(singing)

Isabel Gallegmore:

Good morning, everyone.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Isabel Gallegmore:

I'd like to begin today with an excerpt from a text by an experimental poet, Juliana Spahr. This is a poem that deliberately uses repetition to seek connection not only between people, but between people and the rest of the world. It comes from her book, *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, and I invite you, as you listen to this poem, to think about the space that surrounds you in this moment, as well as your own breath.

At the beginning of the poem, Spahr focuses on the space between the hands. There is space between the hands and space around the hands. There is space around the hands and space in the room. Her meditation grows outward. She writes, "As everyone with lungs breathes, the space between the hands, and the space around the hands, and the space of the room, and the space of the building that surrounds the room, and the space of the neighborhoods nearby, and the space of the cities, and the space of the regions, and the space of the nations, and the space of the continents and islands, and the space of the oceans, and the space of the troposphere, and the space of the stratosphere, and the space of the mesosphere, in and out. In this, everything turning and small being breathed in and out by everyone with lungs during all the moments."

Recently, I found myself thinking of this poem. Perhaps this is because I'm keenly aware of the space between myself and my home in the UK, where I usually reside. But on a deeper level, I know that I return to this poem because it suggests a form of radical connection with the rest of the world. Often, when we think of space, we think of disconnection. On occasion, we ask to be given our space, and retreat into a different room. We talk of the importance of personal space, especially in crowded locations, but in Spahr's poem, space is what connects us, because space is what we breathe.

When I read the poem aloud, as I just have, the sentences become longer, moving from the space between the hands to the space of the mesosphere, and my breath becomes strained as the scale grows larger and larger. To connect with others around us is often no easy thing. But when we talk about connecting globally, this becomes ever more challenging. How do we connect to what's happening in another neighborhood, let alone another country or continent? The strain that the poem puts in my voice echoes that strain of traversing distance and difference.

The air that we breathe across the world is shared with so many humans, yes, but also Blue Jays, Scottish red deer, black beetles, Sumatran tigers, humpback whales. I breathe in and wonder, "What am I taking from the world?" I breathe out and wonder, "What am I giving back?"

My poetic practice often engages with environmental issues such as climate change, and I can't help feeling this space that surrounds all of us. Our hands, our conscience, is at risk of irreversible damage that the air we breathe is fragile.

Last week, I heard children playing a game. Each one had to say, "I went to the store and I bought..." and lists an item, "an apple." The next child continued by repeating that item alongside their own, "bread", until the last child has a whole grocery list. It's a game designed to develop memory and listening skills, and it reminded me of the simplicity of Spahr's poem, and how it uses a childlike and, and, and, to grow in size, connecting hands, room, building, neighborhood, cities, nations, constants, up to the

mesosphere. To connect on a global scale, I read the newspaper, I make a Zoom call. But then again, I think of what connects us, and I find it is as simple as the breath.

Elizabeth Propst:

Will you please rise and pray with me?

God, our maker and our redeemer, as we look out on the new morning of your creation, let the love that we see, made manifest in your works, guard our hearts against hopelessness and despair. And let the love that we see in all your creation, from its least to its greatest parts, also remind us that we are called to be makers and cultivators of love, in the world that you have given us to care for, and to care for us in turn. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join in saying the words that Christ taught us, saying...

Congregation:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy word be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Elizabeth Propst:

Please join us in singing our concluding hymn, number three in your crimson Harvard hymnal.

Congregation/Choir:

(singing)

Elizabeth Propst:

Christ has no voice in this world but your voice, and no hands in this world but your hands. And let our hands and our voices do the work of justice and love, on this day and on all days. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.