

Courtney Godwin:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Good morning.

Courtney Godwin:

Welcome to Morning Prayers. My name is Courtney Godwin, and I'm the interim minister here at Memorial Church. Unfortunately, our scheduled speaker was unable to join us this morning, so I'm filling in. If you will, please rise and join me in our responsive reading. Psalm 130, "Out of the depths have I called to you, oh God. Hear my voice. Let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication."

Congregation:

If you were to note what is done amiss, O God, who could stand?

Courtney Godwin:

For there is forgiveness with you, therefore, you shall be here.

Congregation:

I wait for you, oh God, my soul waits for you. In your word, is my hope.

Courtney Godwin:

My soul waits for you more than the centuries for the morning, more than centuries for the morning.

Congregation:

O Israel, wait upon God, for with God there is mercy.

Courtney Godwin:

With God, there's plenteous of redemption. God shall redeem Israel from all their sons.

Choir:

(singing)

Courtney Godwin:

"Breathe," said the wind. "How can I breathe at a time like this when the air is full of smoke, of burning tires, burning lives?" "Just breathe," the wind insisted. "Easy for you to say, if the weight of injustice is not wrapped around your throat, cutting off all air." "I need you to breathe. I need you to breathe." "Don't tell me to be calm when there are so many reasons to be angry, so much cause for despair." "I didn't say to be calm," said the wind. "I said to breathe. We're going to need a lot of air to make this hurricane together."

I don't know how to be angry. My therapist told me years ago that this is unfortunately common. We are taught that anger is inappropriate, so we don't express it, and then it manifests in other destructive ways, like depression.

This morning, as a fun thought experiment, I let myself count the number of times I felt angry, even vaguely annoyed or upset, on my less than one-mile, 17-minute walk to work. It started before I even left the house. I dropped my toast. Then three cars ran a red light while I waited to cross the intersection. Then I had to hold my breath not once but twice as I passed someone smoking on the street just to avoid a puff of my inhaler. I was mad that the coffee shop wasn't open yet, even though I have not once stopped there in the morning. By the time I got to campus, I was feeling pretty miserable. I was feeling sorry for myself, and I was utterly regretting this decision.

Like many of you probably, I have felt horrified, and heartbroken, and helpless these last few weeks. The world is hurting, and there is no adequate response. I am angry. I am angry at the oppressive systems we live under. I am angry at the loss of beloved sacred life. And I'm angry at myself for all the ways in which I'm complicit. And I don't know what to do with that anger.

It is times like these that I think of the poem I just read to you by Unitarian Universalist Minister Lynn Ungar. When I don't know what the next right thing is, I take a breath and then another. And I remind myself that each and every breath is so much more. Breath is a stabilizer, regulating our central nervous system, grounding us in our bodies. Breath is relational. We all share the same air in what poet Juliana Spahr calls This Connection of Everyone with Lungs.

Breath is a prayer. And when used correctly, breath is a powerful tool for change. We breathe to lift our voices in song or to raise them against injustice. We breathe to power our next steps as oxygen spreads through our bodies via our bloodstream. We breathe to remind ourselves of the preciousness of life, of our own fragility, of our body's determination to keep going when our hearts want to give up.

When I rounded Memorial Hall this morning, my heart wanted to give up. The anger at these little things was not serving me. But then I passed under the oak trees, and the sky opened up for me over Science Plaza, and there was a rainbow. I stopped for a few minutes to recenter myself, and yes, to breathe. I remembered the first rainbow in Genesis, a covenant between us and God after tragedy.

And I remembered the anger that I started with this morning, the anger at the devastation of war, the anger at our government, the anger yet another mass shooting. This is the anger that will fuel my compassion today that will keep me fighting to change these systems that will hold off the helplessness and the hopelessness from sinking in. And I heard the wind tell me, "I didn't say to be calm. I said to breathe. You will need a lot of air to make this hurricane together."

Will you please join me in prayer? God of the bow, you breathed life into us and called us to be your people. Thank you for the gifts of anger. Help us to know when and how to use our anger for justice, for hope, and for love. Amen.

Choir:

Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please raise your body, your spirit and join me in the Lord's prayer. Our Father...

Choir:

Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will 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, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Courtney Godwin:

Please join in singing our concluding hymn, number 271. I love Thy Kingdom. Lord.

Choir:

(singing).

Courtney Godwin:

Before we go out into our days, I invite you to take a breath with me. Inhale deep into the spaciousness of your lungs. Hold it for a moment. And when you're ready, let it out, exhale slowly. May you return to this breath throughout the day, and may it ground you, connect you, and give you hope. May your breath be a prayer. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.