

As somebody with asthma, I am maybe more aware of breathing than the average person. I am grateful for the days that my breathing is normal, grateful for those times when I am exercising and I have all the lung capacity I need, and aware of those time when my body needs more air than it's getting.

You know, the average respiration rate for a person at rest is about 16 breaths per minute. This means on average, we breathe about 960 breaths an hour, 23,040 breaths a day, 8,409,600 a year. If a person lives to 80, then that means on average they will take 672,768,000 breaths in a lifetime!

That's a lot of breathing that each and every one of us is doing. And not just us, all those Northbranch folks worshipping at Northview are breathing, and all the people worshipping over at Holy Trinity are breathing. Everyone in Ankeny, and everyone in Iowa, well, let's just cut to the chase, the whole world is breathing in and out, every minute, everywhere there are people.

Little children breath even more breaths on average, and when a baby is born, parents look eagerly for that first breath—that sign that their baby is ok.

A couple of thousand years ago, two parents checked eagerly to see that their baby was breathing—that the regularity of breaths and heartbeat that keep each of us alive were beginning as they should for this new small one. And they did. He breathed, and his heart beat. He was alive in the same way that each of us live. Breathing that average of 16 breaths per minute that is the same as you and I, the same as all of us.

A couple of thousand years ago, God became present and alive in the world, breathing, heart-beatingly alive. God trusted humanity enough to bring the divine to earth in the same way

that we are on earth. God trusted God's creation—a creation God called good, a people made in God's own image—to bring fulfillment to God's promise in the body of Jesus.

And Jesus' ministry was accomplished in a flesh and blood, physically lived way. He didn't come to earth as a fully formed adult, raising his hands and proclaiming salvation. He didn't gather a group and explain the concepts and doctrines behind salvation. He didn't write a treatise and submit it to authorities to authorize salvation for the appropriate people.

No, "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." First Jesus took in those early infant breaths, short and fast—slowly leading to more adult breaths, longer and slower. Jesus learned to walk, crawling first, pulling himself up, putting one foot in front of the other. Jesus learned to talk, and walk, to grow and work. Jesus was baptized with water, ate meals with all kinds of folks, taught as he sat in the temple or under a shade tree. Jesus healed by reaching out, touching, and spitting in the dirt. And ultimately, Jesus brought salvation to all people by giving up his body—through pain and suffering, aches and wounds, sadness and grief, the sharp burn of the lash, the dull ache of the nails, the slow fading of his last breath.

And when he came back, he didn't come back as an idea, he wasn't a ghost, he wasn't in any way less than fully human. He caught up with his disciples on the beach and said to them, "Hey, you got anything to eat?" And he ate a piece of broiled fish. Jesus came back wearing his skin—fully alive—fully in his body.

Paul writes: "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

Through Jesus—through the concrete, physical reality of his life, death and resurrection—we have new life now. We have hope now. We have the promise of God now and forever.

That's not a concept that we need to assent to, that we need to come to assess, understand and otherwise bring our intellectual responses to bear upon. It's not an agreement we need to sign off on once we can agree to it without reservation. Thankfully, it is not any of those.

All too often we want to intellectualize our understanding of God. Instead of faith we have spirituality. God and God's place in our lives somehow becomes divorced from our bodies—from our day-to-day lives. Instead it seems that God connects and feeds only our soul and our soul and our bodies are two different things. Author Mark Allen Powell says God's presence becomes for us like the "force" in the Star Wars movies—some sort of transcendent power for good—an otherworldly presence that we hope will care for us.

But the fulfillment of God's promise isn't a set of doctrines, and it's not ideas that transcend our world and our place in it. The fulfillment of God's promise is a person who lived in a particular time and a specific place. God's promise is Jesus,.

And that's a reality that we breath in and breath out. It's a hope that we walk in, day in and day out. It's a promise that forms us, that shapes us and that calls us to a response that is acted out in holding, reaching, giving, kneeling, clasping. It's a reality that we live into with our bodies, even as it was made possible for us by another body.

God made flesh for us in Jesus Christ means that our faith is embodied—it's physical—it's lived. The things I remember about my early life in the church are physical things—and for those of you who don't know me, I was raised Catholic, so these memories reflect that experience. I remember the way the wafer melted on my tongue. I remember the sound of the bells rung during the Eucharist. I remember the cloistered darkness of the confessional. I remember the crossed candles at my throat for the feast of St. Blaise. I remember the roughness

of the smear of ashes across my forehead. I remember walking the playground with the rosary beads moving through my fingers. I remember the feel of the carpeted kneelers in the pews.

Now I experience my faith through the slightly sweet, graininess of the bread here at Resurrection. Through the water coursing through my fingers to a baby's head. Through the oil, marking a sliding cross on a forehead. I experience my faith through my own hands crossed over my forehead in my morning prayers. Through the taste of coffee and a muffin at Saturday morning bible study. Through the pattern of glasses on, glasses off, as I read and respond to visitors while preparing my sermon.

We live out our faith in our bodies, bodies created and labeled good by God in God's own image. Bodies that carry us through the hope of the good news just as the body of Jesus brought forth that good news for us.

And God made flesh in Jesus Christ—the embodied nature of what we believe also inevitably connects us to each other.

Occasionally, when I am walking behind someone, and there aren't a lot of people around, I will study that person and see if I can't walk like them. I'll add a hitch to my step, or lengthen my stride, or swing my arms. And it's interesting how, in the act of walking like them, I get—ever so slightly—the sense of what it's like to be them. I'll sense what it's like to occupy their space in the world, to walk their way, for just a bit.

Our hearts all beat the same. And our lungs all pull in, process and send out air the same. And our muscles all work in concert to keep us upright and walking and reaching and living the same. We are one body, we are connected to each other, we are bound to one another. God made flesh in Jesus Christ means, in a real sense, that we are called to enter one another's world. To reach out to those who seem a world apart, and step into their worlds, to reach into their spaces,

to live and breath in their lives so that they are no longer apart from us, but instead, we are together. By doing that we keep the love of God alive and visible in our world.

But here's what I think is the most important part of that little breathing baby, born a couple'a thousand years ago.

That little baby born shows the incredible length and breadth and depth of God's love for us. To enter our world. To breathe our air. To walk our ground. To make the promise of God real in the fullness of a life given over for our sake. So that we might live without fear. So that we might live in freedom, so that we might live in the joy of a promise kept, a hope made real, a body made flesh. Mark Allen Powell says that the thing about the "force" in those Star Wars movies was that it was something that you used, not something that you loved—and certainly not something that loved you first. But God loved us enough to send Jesus, and because of Jesus, we can love God back.

So as we are gathered here tonight, know the love of God as you breathe in and out, taste God's grace in the sweet graininess of the bread and hear again the incredible promise spoken again and again as we join our voices to sing the miracle that happened when the Word became flesh and lived among us.