

Jesus Breathed On Them

The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear.

It was dark and they were afraid.

Their voices were hushed and tense. They would spare little light. Their troubled faces, barely shadows across the table. A knock at the barred door might come. It might be the authorities ... *weren't you also with Jesus?* That could mean death. Or, it might be Mary Magdalene. Grief-fraught, spilling a wild tale of resurrection. A madness that might get them caught.

It was dark and they were full of grief and regret.

It's all over now. Jesus is gone. Why did we leave him? Why did we join him? Jesus is gone. All that talk of love and peace, brought to a bitter violent end. What was it all worth?

It was dark and they could see no future.

Where can we go now? What should we do?

The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear.

They were paralyzed by grief. Hopeless in their loss. Frozen in the grip of uncertainty.

The disciples locked out the world, sealed themselves off from life.

They entombed themselves in the dark, trapped in fear as thick as stone.

But Jesus came and stood among them and said,

“Peace be with you”...

He showed them his hands and side.

They rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

I'll bet they did.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you...

As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them,

“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus breathed on them. ‘*Breathed*’. The Greek word there is *ένεθησω*. In the entire New Testament, this particular word for ‘breathed— *ένεθησω*— only shows up once. Here. Just this one time. And that means something special is going on. You know how many times *ένεθησω* shows up in the Old Testament? Twice. Only twice in 39 books. Twice in 929 chapters. Only twice in over 23,000 Old

Testament verses. This is *big*.

This ‘breathed’ first shows up in Genesis. At the very dawn of creation, at the awakening of humankind:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

And it appears in Ezekiel, in that well-known dry bones passage:

Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,
and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.
I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them,
and they lived and stood on their feet.

Jesus appeared to the disciples in that dark house of fear. He walked into their tomb, and breathed on them. And they received *life itself*. The new life of the Holy Spirit. The very *breath* of God.

Through the Spirit, Christ renewed the disciples. He gave them the hope and strength to dispel fear. To live, and stand on their feet. To go out, unafraid, and share the Good News.

But not all the disciples were there.

Where was Thomas? The one whom tradition has called ‘the doubter.’ Doubting Thomas;

I don’t think we’ve been very fair to him, giving him that name.

Jesus came and stood among them and said,

“Peace be with you” . . .

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Jesus came to the disciples, not only to ease their fears, but also to challenge them. To say,
Why are you locked up in here? Get up, get back out there. You’ve seen me now. No more despairing. No more fear. Here is my Spirit, the spirit of life. Take my breath within you now and use it. Go and spread the word of God’s undying love for the world.

But where was Thomas?

The bible doesn’t say. We only know where Thomas *wasn’t*.

Thomas was not hiding out... He wasn’t cowering in the dark with the others. Thomas was not one easily given over to fear. You all know story of Lazarus, right? The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead? But do you remember Thomas’s part in it? Most don’t.

When Jesus finally decided to go to Judea, the place of Lazarus’ tomb, the disciples all panicked and said, *Woah, Jesus, the Jews were just about to stone you in Judea... And now you wanna go back there? Bad idea dude.* But not Thomas. Thomas said, *Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus.*

Let us go, that we may die with Jesus... Wow...

Thomas’s faith is grave; it’s determined, it’s compassionate and fearless. And after Jesus’ crucifixion,

Thomas is *still out there*—out in the dangerous world—not hidden away in the shadows.

Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.

So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

When Thomas hears of Jesus’ appeared to the others, he returns to them. And he returns with a deep and powerful desire: *I want to see Jesus too, he says. And I want to touch him. I want to see his hands and his side. I want to touch them. I want to hear his voice, and feel his breath...at the same time I see his wounds. Because I want to know that there is life and hope and grace and peace.*

I want to know there’s a God that just won’t quit. Because out there in the world, it’s dark, and it’s dangerous... The violence, the fear, the suffering, and hopelessness.

So I want to see this new life that lives and breathes and loves, and still carries the wounds. Because then I’ll know the news is good and is real. And I’ll know the true meaning of the resurrection.

Because what is new life? What is new life if the wounds of humanity are forgotten or left behind?

Thomas is saying,

Show me these things, and I’ll know that God is truly with us. That God is with us, not for a fleeting, ghost-like appearance in a secret room. But as a real, concrete presence in our ongoing lives.

One that walks with us still, in our suffering and all our human trials.

One that eases grief and breaks the grip of enslaving fear.

One that frees us from the fear that locks us up, shuts us down, and keeps us from living fully and loving without limit.

Thomas is saying,

Show me the mortal wounds, and show me eternal life—all at once—all at once in the body of Christ...

*Then I’ll know...God loves us and will be with us **no matter what**... and for ever.*

For Thomas, reaching out to touch the wounds of Jesus is not a sign of doubt. It’s the consuming desire to feel God’s wholeness at work. At work amid the wounds of the world. It’s the desire to be out in the harsh world and yet feel the living, life-giving Spirit—the very breath of God— moving within and around us. Especially in places of brokenness and pain.

It’s what Thomas needs to live. To live and breathe the new life Christ offers. It’s what Thomas needs in order to confess God’s deep love for humanity. In order to say, *My Lord and my God!*

Three brand new children of God were baptized this day.

Betsy... Betsy, you, and all of us here who’ve lived for a while... We know just how harsh the world can

be. Just how wounded the world is. And Adelaide, and Richard, in time, they will find that out too.

But today, these three have been given a powerful, life-changing, amazing gift:

Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

He said it to each of us at of our baptisms too. Each of us has received life. *A brand new life* to be filled with peace and joy and inner light. A life to be lived without fear... no matter how dark things get.

Each of us has received life. A life filled with grace because we know ...we know God has called us and claimed us, and will never let us go.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.