

Breathe in to Breathe Out

Acts 2:14a,22-32

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Psalm 16

On June 14, 2025, a world record was set by the Croatian freediver Vitomir Maričić who held his breath underwater for 29 minutes and 3 seconds. He accomplished this using a technique that included breathing pure oxygen beforehand. Without pure oxygen, freedivers can hold their breath for more than 10 minutes. Stephane Mifsud set that record by holding her breath underwater for 11 minutes and 35 seconds. Regardless of the technique, those are staggering figures, given the fact that normal humans can hold their breath for a maximum of two minutes in comparison. These elite freedivers accomplish their skill through extensive training. That training is focused on two main things: extreme relaxation to avoid panic and taking very deep breaths. (No kidding) Ultimately, whether we need 1 breath or 30 in a half hour, all of us live because of our ability to breathe.

In today's reading from John, he speaks of Jesus breathing God's Spirit into the disciples and then commissioning them, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you." This is THE central mission of the church. But it did not begin in first century Judea. It started in The Garden.

When God created the world, it was this breath, this ruach, this wind of the Spirit that hovered over the waters, dividing them and forming the world into existence. Then God molded humankind, bent down, and breathed this same breath into Adam. In The Garden, there was no separation between the presence of God and humans. The breath of life, eternal, creative, and all-powerful, flowed freely into the humans, empowering them to do the work God crafted them to do in tending the created order. When humans chose to disrupt that free-flowing unity by turning away from God, sin entered the world. To protect them from eating the Tree of Life in that state of division from God, which would have

secured their separation from God eternally, God ushered them out of The Garden and their direct access to God ceased.

After humans fled The Garden, God's Spirit did appear on earth at certain times and places; with certain people, but never within them. The power of evil had been loosed and until it was conquered, God's Spirit was unable to have pure fellowship within humankind. The Tabernacles and eventually the temple were established as places people could encounter God's presence, but it was always mediated from behind a veil. Humans were created to be in perfect fellowship and union with God's own self, to have God's life-giving breath flowing through them, but it was not until Jesus' resurrection that the power of death was conquered that our unity with God could be restored.

When Jesus breathes on the disciples, saying "receive the Holy Spirit," He was offering us a way back into the fellowship through which we can fully be empowered to live into our design. Jesus said, "**As** the Father sent me, so I send you." Jesus gave us access back into our identity and our source, commissioning us just as **he** had been commissioned. Until Jesus returns to complete the defeat of evil and death in a full and final way, we join Jesus' mission in the work of reconciling the world back into unity with God. Everything regarding Jesus' mission is now true of ours, including the power to do it and the cost it will require. That is the theology. And it is far more powerful than most of us stop to consider!

When we encounter the disciples in today's story, they had not yet been given the Spirit. They had walked with Jesus, they knew the power he had, the apostles had even tasted it for themselves. But the disciples had merely witnesses his work as students, not participants. After Jesus death, we find them hiding behind locked doors, terrified of those who killed Jesus. Rather than try to convince his trembling friends to open the doors, Jesus simply appeared in front of them and offered them the peace of his presence. He had not expected them to behave as though he was alive because they had not yet encountered

him alive. But once they encountered him, once Jesus breathed his spirit into them, this terrified group of disciples changed the world.

Thomas gets a bad rap for refusing to believe the disciples account, but he had not yet encountered Jesus. He was behaving reasonably and we would have done the same. Rather than chide him, once again, Jesus offered Thomas the experience of his presence, the reality of otherworldly peace. Thomas's name in Greek is Didymus, which means Twin. There is no mention anywhere of Thomas having a twin. He's called Twin because his behavior reflects ours. Thomas is our Twin and we are his. If we want to experience the power of the risen Christ, to become unified with the life of God, and live into our purpose, Jesus knows we must first encounter his presence and breathe in his life.

John uses the word belief, which means trust, nearly 100 times in his gospel. This word, believe, is a verb. It is not a noun. It implies action, literally meaning "believing into." It is a word that is both relational and responsive. For John, faith is not something to hold, rather it is something to do. Believing is about relying on God and entrusting ourselves into the eternal life of God. When Peter cites this same idea, he uses words like faith and hope.

In today's Epistle, Peter says that "we are being protected by the power of God through faith". The word protected is a military term indicating the shelter a city experiences when surrounded by a garrison of soldiers. It is our **faith** which guards us as we live in this tension between the already and the not yet. We have the identity and strength of the living God coursing through us, and yet we live in a world that continues to feel death's grip. Like on D-Day, the world knew liberation was underway, but the full and final victory of VE-Day had yet to arrive. Faith is what protests our hearts when our experiences of the presence of God feel faint. Hope is our response to God's reality when our own feels overwhelming. Hope makes it possible for us live with joy, even as we navigate the messiness and pain of human life outside The Garden.

King David was a precursor of Christ, a shadow showing an outline of the Messiah who was yet to come. In David's Psalm he speaks of living in hope, remaining unshaken, and full of gladness. The way he says he does this is by imagining the Lord always before him. Reminding himself of what is true of God's love, power, and nearness, even when he didn't see or feel it,- made it possible for him to remain strong even when facing death. King David was one of those Hebrew Bible figures who was anointed by God's Spirit. He was surrounded by the Spirit, the Spirit was on him, and empowered him for God's special work, but even David was not filled with the Spirit in the way God filled Adam, nor in the way Jesus filled the disciples, nor in the way the spirit now fills us!

When Jesus inaugurated the church by breathing his Spirit into us, reconciling us into unity with God, he made us a New Creation. He joined us with the work God performed in creation, integrating us back into the life of God. We are now meant to be visible to the world as this New Creation, powerfully and profoundly working towards reconciliation and restoration into a world that is alienated from God and one another. This is the sacred work God gave Jesus to do, and it is the work we now do with and through God's Spirit.

The final words of John's gospel explain the reason why he wrote his account of Jesus' life. He wrote so that we would believe, and through believing, we would find life. John's stories are not meant for our merely intellectual acceptance or even our entertainment. They are meant to create within us the active belief that animates life. But, like Thomas, we won't find faith without first encountering God's presence. For us, two thousand years after the ascension, we probably won't see the enfleshed body of Jesus. But Jesus left for us his spirit. And it is through that spirit that we are empowered to believe.

When we, like David, place God before us in our mind and heart, we remember the presence of the resurrected Christ. Jesus is forever breathing out God's spirit. Divers practice breathing deeply. Like divers, our work starts by learning to inhale.

May we be a people unified with Christ, empowered to live as a new creation, fulfilling our purpose, dedicated to the practice of breathing deeply from our source of life.