



Sermon starter: the breath of God



for the 2020 Pentecost Offering of the Church of the Brethren

“On the evening of gather first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again, Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that, he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”

~John 20:19-23

For this week, we celebrate Pentecost and the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon peoples from many languages and nations. This is the gift that Jesus promised in John 14, 15 and Acts 1 that was made manifest in Acts 2. Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In our Pentecost Offering theme scripture of John 20:19-23, Jesus appears to his disciples who are locked in and afraid. It is important to ask, “why were they afraid? What was causing them to be locked in and afraid?”

Today in many towns, villages, cities, and nations, people are locked in and afraid. People are doing their best to protect themselves and their neighbors from being infected by the coronavirus, COVID-19.

The Bible records that Jesus himself breaks into their fear and locked in place, and stands among them. This, my friend, will preach!

Jesus comes to us in our places of need, places of impossibility, places of uncertainty and he himself stands among us, saying “Peace be with you.”

There is much that can be said about this text, and below I’ve shared a few suggestions and reflection questions for you as you prepare this month’s Pentecost message.

What in this text stands out to you? What images? What words? What sounds? What do you see? Write it down.

Two things for me stood out in preparation.

1) Jesus stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.”

The Bible records that Jesus stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." He showed them his hands and his side and again said, "Peace be with you."

Now this peace in his culture and context was a greeting of peace, a blessing upon a people. In the Hebrew it's the word "Shalom" which literally means "nothing missing and nothing broken." The risen Jesus stands among those locked in and afraid and says, "Peace be with you. Shalom. Nothing missing and nothing broken."

2) Secondly what stands out to me is that he says, "Peace be with you" a second time. A double blessing. A double shalom. And after that he breathes on them. He breathes. Jesus breathes on them. This is the only place in the Bible where we see Jesus breathing on people.

In the book of Genesis, after God spoke the world into being, the Bible records that God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils and he became a living soul. God spoke the worlds into being, but God breathed life into humanity. (Genesis 2:17)

In John 20, Jesus speaks peace to his disciples and then breathes life upon them in their locked in and afraid situation. Not only that, but he says receive the Holy Spirit.

What are the places that we need God to breathe on us?

What are the places for you personally that you need Jesus himself to stand in the midst and breathe?

Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit"

Jesus says, "Receive the Holy Spirit"

Sermon Prep Suggestions

1. Take some moments at the beginning and throughout the week to live with the scripture.

Read John 20:19-23 out loud. Write it out by hand.

What images do you see, hear, what messages speak to you?

2. Intentionally listen to songs and read and meditate on scripture related to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1, Acts 2, John 14, John 15 and John 20 are some of my favorites.

As I was preparing for writing this resource, I purposefully listened to songs that focused on the Holy Spirit. Here is one that was a blessing to me. I pray you enjoy it, too. I recommend finding a quiet place and being still as you listen.

"Holy Spirit, Breath of God" by Keith and Kristyn Getty. <https://youtu.be/N8FKZlZ97AU>

3. In your prayer time ask God, “What is your message for your people in this time?” This will provide a clear direction and foundation for the sermon.

Reflection Questions

- What are the needs and issues going on with your people?
- What is going on in the community and local area where your church lives?
- What is happening in the national and international context?
- What are the places we need God to breathe?
- Where are the places we need God to breathe upon us?

Know this, God breathes on our sermon preparation, for God looks after God’s word to perform it. To leave you with another song I kept hearing as I lived with the Pentecost Offering theme scripture: “Breathe on Me, Breath of God.” Have a listen.

<https://youtu.be/MmkzSjs9eAw>

<https://youtu.be/rlyo3neR6xg>

Together with Christ,

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