

Breathe

April 11, 2010

(Easter 2 – Year C)

John 20: 19-31

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Please be seated

Peace be with you.

{large exhaling breath}

It is with such a large and exhaling breath that the Risen Jesus greets his disciples.

On that first Easter Sunday night, the disciples are gathered behind closed doors in fear.

And Jesus comes and stands among them and says:

“Peace be with you.”

Then Jesus shows his followers the nail marks in his hands and the spear wound in his side, still there from his crucifixion.

Again, Jesus says.

“Peace be with you.”

Then, Jesus breathes on them.

And as he breathes on them,

Jesus says:

“Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Over the centuries, we have had a difficult time proving to people that Jesus is alive.

We have a difficult time proving that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

After the women had discovered Jesus' empty tomb on Easter morning,
On that first Easter night, Jesus did not appear from the darkness and yell out:

“Surprise! Guess who's back!”

Jesus did not go back to Pilate and Herod and the crowds who shouted for his death, seeking revenge.

Instead, Jesus quietly appeared among them and said:

“Peace be with you.”

He showed them his hands and his side.

And then - he breathed on them.

{large exhaling breath}

When I was a young man, I became a father for the very first time.

In 1991, Susan and I brought our little baby, Scott, home from the hospital.

Susan and I, along with her mother, set up a schedule for who was going to stay vigilant during the night for late night feedings.

My shift was after the 11 o'clock feeding until around 2 in the morning.

So during that time, Scott's bassinette was right beside my side of the bed so that I could listen for his cries.

Yet, in the stillness of the night, all I could hear was the clock ticking.

I would lay awake in bed and listen for any sign of life that was coming from the darkness.

My mind immediately raced ahead, imagining the worst.

What if our baby had gotten tangled up in his blankets?

What if he had gotten choked?

Lying in bed, I listened very carefully in the quiet of the night for any sign of life.

And yet, I could hear nothing, nothing except the beating of my own heart.

Quietly, and trying not to wake Susan, I slipped out of bed and moved as quietly as I could over to the side of the bassinette.

Slowly, I put my head down into the dark bassinette and I put my ear up to Scott's face.

Then, I heard the sound that was such a relief:

That slow, small sound of his tiny baby's breath.

Scott was alive!

And in the darkness, I did not need to see my son.

All I needed to know that he was alive was to feel that tiny stream of air
against my cheek and to hear his breath.

{large exhaling breath}

Breath is the proof we need that there is life.

The Body of Jesus is no longer around to appear to us in dark upper
rooms and to breathe on us.

However, the Body of Christ is alive and well today.

And we call that Body of Christ: the Church.

Now I know that there are some people who are suspicious of
“organized religion.”

And there are probably just as many people who are suspicious of the
resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Some people say that they don't need Jesus or the Church in order to
find God.

Some people say that you can find God in a forest or on a golf course.

Some people will say that you can find God in a book or in a poem.

But you cannot hear and feel the breath of Jesus on a golf course or in a
book.

You can only hear and feel the breath of Jesus when the Body of Christ,
when the Church, breathes.

We know that Jesus is alive when the Body of Christ breathes, with the
loud inhaling and exhaling of human and divine inspiration.

When we come together every Sunday as the Body of Christ, I hear and
feel your breath as we sing and respond to God's Word.

When we come together every Sunday as the Body of Christ, I hear and
feel your breath as we share our hopes and our fears together.

When we come together every Sunday as the Body of Christ, our
resurrected breath makes us into the resurrected Body of Jesus.

Today, we are baptizing Tatum Morissette into this resurrected Body of
Christ.

Her breath will join with our breath, making the Body of Jesus on this
earth, which is alive and creates and inspires.

Together with Tatum, we will be the resurrected Body of Christ.

Sometimes people look for proof that God has raised Jesus from the dead.

Yet the only proof that I need is when I live and move and breathe among you, because I live and move and breathe among the living Body of Christ.

Jesus Christ is alive!

And when we think he is dead, we only need to stick our head into the dark bassinette and to feel his breath on our cheek.

When we think that he is dead, he comes among us in the dark night of our soul, through you and through me, and says:

“Peace be with you.”

And then –

He breathes on us.

{large exhaling breath}

AMEN.

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