

# Sermon for Sunday, April 19, 2020 - "The Breath of Peace"

Second Sunday of Easter - Online Service  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

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Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

In these strange times, the good news of Jesus is coming to us through all sorts of different technology. This week it came to me through an email from Good Shepherd's Visitation Pastor, Pr. Marion Pruitt-Jefferson. She wrote this to me about today's Gospel reading: "How wonderfully appropriate it is that this week, Jesus just flat out invades the 'quarantined' disciples' home and breathes - not a virus - but God's peace on them all. No masks - no defenses - just an outpouring of peace that we can breathe right into our bodies. YES!"

Yes, indeed! Thank you Pr. Marion! An outpouring of peace to breathe right into their bodies is just what those first disciples needed. They faced a very real threat from the authorities who had just killed their teacher. They *were* in a type of quarantine, hiding behind locked doors. When Jesus breathed peace upon them, then they were able to believe and hope and trust. Thomas wasn't there with them, so of course he struggled to believe - he needed that breath of peace that they had received.

We, too, face a very real threat. We *need* to be home behind closed doors. And oh, do we need the breath of peace now. So many in our world right now are struggling with shortness of breath and chest pain, so many are trying to breathe through anxiety and fear. There is so much chaos, so much fear.

AND In the midst of all this chaos, God continues to breathe peace and new life for our whole world. This is what God does. This is what God has done from the beginning, what God has done in Christ Jesus, and what God does for you today.

Breathing life is what God has done from the beginning. The two creation stories in the book of Genesis give us wonderful pictures of God breathing.

In Genesis 1 we see God breathing life into chaos. We're told, in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, **there was a whole lot of chaos.** Well actually it says, "The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep," but the Hebrew word for deep can also be translated *chaos*. So, God is familiar with chaos. And God knows what to do amidst chaos.

We're told when the earth was a chaotic, formless void, "**A wind from God swept over the face of the waters.**" The Hebrew word for wind, *ruah*, also means breath and spirit. So, when there was only chaos, God breathed over the waters. **When everything was chaotic, God took a deep breath.**

So, in this crazy, chaotic time it is very Godly to pause and take some deep breaths. I'll invite you to do that with me this morning as we move through this time - inviting you to breathe in, breathe

out. If you can't breathe deeply right now, we'll do it for you and with you. As we do, we'll pray silently in solidarity with those who are struggling to breathe for whatever reason. Breathe in, breathe out.

Genesis 1 shows us God breathing life into chaos by the power of the Spirit. It also shows us God speaking life into being through the Word we now call Jesus. God spoke, "Let there be light, and let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and so on." God breathed and spoke creation into being by the power of the Word and the power of the Spirit.

After the first creation story in Genesis 1, we get another one in Genesis 2. That story helps us to know that God doesn't just breathe out over all the chaos, God also breathes this breath of life into each of us. In Genesis 2, God walks around in the garden and gets down in the dust and we're told, "form[s] Adam from the dust of the ground and breath[es] into his nostrils the breath of life." This story shows how very close God is - as close as our breath - forming us, shaping us, breathing life into us.

And, throughout scripture we see that breathing the breath of life isn't something God has done once. As Psalm 104 says of all living things,<sup>30</sup> When you send forth your spirit, (your ruah)\* they are created; and you renew the face of the earth. God continues in every moment to create and breathe out life and peace. Breathe in, breathe out.

God created us to breathe deeply the breath of life. God intends for us to honor and care for all life and breath. And yet, life in this world is marred by sin and sickness, suffering and death. Life in this world is not as God intends it to be.

So many struggle to breathe for all sorts of reasons. So many breathe their last far too soon. We take the gift of breath for granted. We do not care for the life and breath of others. Yet even in this, God is so very close to us. God has entered even into sin, suffering and death with us. God, in Jesus, hung on a cross, cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last. Jesus, the word of God, suffered and died as a result of our own human sin and violence.

All seemed lost, all was chaotic. Jesus' disciples were huddled behind locked doors in fear. Yet, the Word and Breath of God could not be stopped. The Word and Breath of God overcame all the forces of death to live again and live on. And then Jesus came to the disciples who were locked in fear, panicking, maybe even hyperventilating. He spoke, saying, "Peace be with you," and then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus spoke and breathed new life out of the chaos, as it was in the beginning. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be. Jesus' word of God comes to us to recreate and renew our life. Jesus comes to speak peace and breathe out God's Holy Spirit for all of us and our world.

The breath of the Holy Spirit gives us peace and strength in the midst of our own personal chaos. It also gives what we need to be part of God's ongoing, lifegiving work of renewal and recreation in our world.

So, we don't have to panic when we consider the chaos in our own lives, the chaos all around us. We can breathe in God's Holy Spirit and trust that Jesus is alive and at work in and through us for the sake of the world. We can breathe in God's Holy Spirit and trust that God is as close to us as our breath.

Let's take some time to breathe together now.