



Living with God Breath

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 19th April 2020

John 20:19-23 (NLT) **That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!**

²¹ Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²² If you forgive anyone’s sins they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

Note what it says in verse 19: **...behind locked doors because they were afraid...**

So much has happened that day – Mary Magdalene sees the risen Saviour early in the morning and tells the disciples, Peter and John. They run to the tomb, discover it’s empty. Meanwhile two other disciples are on the way to Emmaus and they encounter Jesus. They return to tell the disciples. Nothing has sunk in yet. None of the disciples have pieced together the teachings of Jesus that he was to rise from the dead.

The Jewish leaders made up a story that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body of Jesus to explain away the resurrection. Word had got around by this time, and so the disciples are now gathered together behind locked doors, probably that same upper room where they had the last supper with Jesus. Locked in and afraid.

I can’t help but draw a parallel between their experience and what is going on globally today. Sure we are under different circumstances but right now we are in our homes under lockdown. I wonder if fear is present? Maybe a nervous uncertainty, or maybe even full blown fear and anxiety. Will I lose my job? What’s the future going to look like? How do we navigate in this new environment? Not unlike the disciples and the situation they were in, we too find ourselves behind locked doors possibly with our own fears.

Verse 19b **Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them!**

Jesus appeared and showed them his hands and feet. Why? They thought he was a ghost. In Luke’s account, Jesus takes a piece of broiled fish and eats it as further proof it wasn’t a ghost they were seeing. It was Christ and He had risen.

“Peace be with you,” he said.

Sounds like a usual everyday greeting in Israel. Even today Shalom (Peace) is the greeting among Jews. “Shalom Aleichem” – peace be upon you. Was Jesus merely greeting them? Was this merely a kia ora? Whats up? How are you doing today? Was Jesus merely wishing them well?

Prior to this, Jesus had already differentiated His shalom with the world’s *shalom*.

John 14:27 “Peace I leave to you, the peace that is mine I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled or dismayed.”

Here Jesus made it quite clear that His shalom was not like the shalom the world greets with. Jesus was saying, “When I speak shalom, it will come as a presence that replaces a troubled heart. When my shalom is present, it removes dismay, anxiety, concern and fear.

Again in John 16:33 (NLT)

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

Every day *shalom* is heard. You are familiar with it being used. But when you greet each other with Shalom, it leaves the trials and sorrows of the world intact in a person. “But take heart – when I speak shalom, I speak as one who has overcome the world. My shalom speaks into your trials, my shalom speaks into your sorrows. My shalom comes with the power to overcome.”

Jesus appears to the disciples and says, “Peace be unto you.” His shalom meant more than the word ‘peace’. Cornelius Plantinga defines Shalom this way: “Shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs...” Plantinga goes on to say, “Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be” (Plantinga, 1995, p.10).

Based on that definition – Jesus was saying when He spoke shalom over them, “I speak and declare shalom into your lives, your situation, your circumstances and declare it to be the way God intends it to be. The way it ought to be.”

I love Bruce Milne’s suggestion too– that Shalom “gathers up all the blessings of the Kingdom of God.”

Jesus enters the room where the disciples are, speaks shalom into the environment of fear, anxiety and uncertainty, and declares shalom – kingdom of God come into this space – Kingdom of God come and shift the environment. And the Bible says, “They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!” The Prince of Peace walks into the room - comes into the environment of fear and shifted the atmosphere – from fear to joy.

Here now, is a practical application for our daily lives – don’t miss this. He says the same phrase again: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”

Jesus is saying: my mission and your mission are the same. Jesus walks into the room – speaks shalom – his very presence shifted the atmosphere in that room.

He then says: I’m sending you with the same mission. When you go somewhere, change the environment wherever you are.

This is our mission. We are sent out to release the Kingdom atmosphere wherever we are. Sunday is not the end of the week. Sunday is the beginning of our week. Sunday is when we build each other up. Sunday is when we gather and recalibrate together; we re-sync with the Holy Spirit. Sunday is when we send each other out again – to release the Kingdom of God from Monday through to the rest of the week.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you

Jesus said, “The father has “apostello” (sent) me out.” That’s the word where we get *apostle* from – sent out. Father has sent me, so I transfer that mission on to you.

We are sent out people. We are an apostolic community. Never ever was the church to become a holy huddle – in locked doors – keeping everyone out, so that we can be safe. We are sent out. Church happens out there where ever you are. Imagine a people of God who see ourselves as sent out ones. Everywhere we go – we are sent out to declare, to release, to speak Kingdom of God atmosphere, Kingdom of God blessings, Kingdom of God outcomes.

That's church. People of God, with an apostolic mandate – sent out – shifting atmospheres, speaking into sickness – Kingdom of God come; speaking into poverty – Kingdom of God come; speaking into broken relationships – Kingdom of God come; speaking into addiction and brokenness – Kingdom of God come.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

I say all this to bring us to our text this morning which is the following verse.

John 20:22 (NLT) **Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”**

Jesus does something extraordinary. He breathed on them. We always think of the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But the Spirit was given on resurrection Sunday.

Two distinctively different experiences the disciples had.

- On Resurrection day – they received the Holy Spirit in them
- Pentecost day (50 days later) – they received the Spirit upon them
- Resurrection day – Spirit in them – transforming their “being”
- Pentecost day – Spirit coming through them – transforming their “doing”

One was for indwelling – the other one for outworking.

I see it as inhaling and exhaling. You cannot exhale the Spirit if you have not first inhaled the Spirit. People want to heal the sick, want signs and wonders to follow the preaching of His word but are not interested in the cultivation of the indwelling presence of the Spirit in their lives. You must breathe in before you breathe out. You cannot exhale, without first inhaling.

Jesus breathed into the disciples – just like the creation story – God breathed into Adam and he became a living being. Now this is re-creation happening again. Jesus breathing into the disciples – “receive the Holy Spirit”. Receive God breath – stop breathing your usual breath – breathe God breath.

About 25 years ago I underwent open heart surgery. They had to repair a defect in my heart. The procedure required me to be connected to a CPB pump – a heart-lung machine – where the machine was doing the work of my heart and lungs while the surgeon worked on my heart.

When I came out of surgery I was placed in Intensive care. When I became conscious again, I had to literally re-learn how to breathe again. There was a nurse by my side – and I could hear her voice calling out – “Andrew, breathe!” I will breathe again and for some reason stop. She'll call out again, “Andrew, breathe!” This went on for a while until I learnt to breathe again.

Jesus breathed into them and said: Receive my holy breath – breathe me – stop breathing the old way – breathe my Spirit breath.

He is our breath, friends. We live because of him. We exist because of the Spirit. He is our breath. We breathe him the first thing in the morning, we breathe him before we sleep. And in between our rising and our sleeping, he is the very air that we breathe, he is the atmosphere that surrounds us. He is our very breath.

We need to relearn to breathe God breath every day. Not just breathing the old way. We need to come to an awareness that the Holy Spirit – the breath of God is dwelling in us. We are breathing God breath. Inhale the Spirit in order to breathe out the Spirit. Inhale the breath of God and exhale the God breath into our work place, our family interactions, our dealings with people every day. So full of God breath that everything we do and say – every single day – is overflowing with God breath – so much so that people around us start experiencing the God breathed atmosphere as we exhale the Spirit in our interactions with them. Imagine an environment so charged up with the Spirit of God – the one who hovered around the chaos and void in the beginning and created the garden. Imagine that same Spirit at work every day – because we brought in the God breathed atmosphere.

Now I must close with John 20:23 (NLT)

**“If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven.
If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

I don’t have time to expand on this – but I want to say that I’m not in favour of current interpretations where Jesus was giving us the authority to forgive or withhold forgiveness. It’s impossible to think that a bunch of guys – who just recently abandoned Jesus, one of them denying outright he knew Jesus, now experience release from condemnation, guilt and doubt. Having experienced all this – now Jesus says, “Go forgive some and deny some the experience of being forgiven.” It doesn’t make sense and is quite contrary to the whole tone of the Gospels.

The Message translation recognises the difficulty popular translations present, and so translates it this way.

John 20:23 (MSG) **"If you forgive someone's sins, they're gone for good. If you don't forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?"**

What I like about this translation is that it does suggest Jesus is throwing a challenge. I think it’s closer to the intention of Jesus. Here’s my take on this. Jesus was saying, “Now that you have experienced resurrection life – now that you have the very breath of God in you – you have inhaled God breath – what are you going to exhale? - What are you gonna do about it? What kind of environment are you gonna produce? You’ve inhaled the environment of forgiveness, now go exhale the environment of forgiveness.”

Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah is helpful here and I feel very relevant.

Isaiah 22:22 (NKJV)

**The key of the house of David
I will lay on his shoulder;
So he shall open, and no one shall shut;
And he shall shut, and no one shall open.**

I believe this is the mission of every disciple with God breath in them. We are now breathing God breath – opening doors for people to experience forgiveness by encountering Jesus the healer, Jesus the redeemer, Jesus the saviour, Jesus the Lord. Shutting down doors that prevent encounters with God – shutting doors of the evil one, shutting doors of religious ideas that prevent people from coming to Christ. Shutting the lies of the enemy that keep people out of a relationship with Jesus.

Let me close with this – I'm inviting you to breathe anew. Every day be aware that you now have the breath of God. Live life inhaling and exhaling God breath.

Every day take time out – when you realise anxiety is in the atmosphere, hurriedness, anger, frustration, fear – whatever is not Kingdom of God atmosphere – where there is no shalom – pause and breathe – inhale God breath, exhale God breath and shift the atmosphere into Kingdom atmosphere.

I bless you today with Shalom – all the blessings of the Kingdom of God.

I speak to your sickness and pain: Kingdom of God come, be healed, be restored.

I say to your fears and anxiety: Kingdom of God come.

I speak into your finances – Kingdom of God come.

I declare Kingdom of God into your relationships.

I bless you with Kingdom of God blessings in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN