

April 8, 2018 • Second Sunday of Easter • Holy Communion • Children's Church

"The Breath of the Risen Lord"

Homily by the Rev. Patricia Farris



John 20:19-22

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Good morning, dear church. It is the Second Sunday of Easter. Because we can't possibly take in all the glory of the Resurrection on one Sunday alone, the church, in its ancient wisdom, gives us seven Sundays, fifty days of "Eastertide," For these fifty days we live into the reality of the Resurrection and all that it means to be a new community formed and shaped by the dying and rising of Christ.

Christ is Risen! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

50 days of Eastertide, because it's just too stupendous to take in all at once. And 50 days because even when we really want to believe it, we, like those very first disciples, find that it's not so easy. Everything in us had been programmed to expect the worst. And that last horrendous Holy Week had been pretty grim. We had seen Jesus breathe his last, we thought. Sure, Mary Magdalene was totally convinced that she had seen the Risen Lord. But aren't we, all too often, still more like those other disciples?

The story we hear this morning, the Second Sunday of Easter, picks back up with them. So frightened and confused. Huddled behind closed, locked doors out of fear of those who had power over them. But a locked door could not keep the Risen Lord out! Sensing their fear, knowing their doubt, Jesus himself went in and stood among them, breathing new life into them, from the other side of the grave. Breathing on them and inviting them to receive the Holy Spirit, as he blessed them with his lasting gift: "Peace be with you."

Can we, church, on this Second Sunday of Easter, can we now, in the quiet of this holy place, can we take a deep breath and know the peace of God, the peace that casts out fear, the peace that brings us alive to love and beauty?

For the breath of the Risen Lord, the breath of God, is the breath of life, as it was in the beginning, and forevermore. From Genesis we read that God shaped the muddy earth into the first human and breathed air into its nostrils to give it life.

From the Book of Job: "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."

And not just "me" alone, but us together. The story we hear this morning is John's version of Pentecost. We're accustomed to hearing Luke's version from the Book of Acts where the Spirit is poured out on all who had gathered. In John's Gospel, it is Jesus himself who breathes the Spirit into that group of gathered disciples. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. A new community. A new people created through the life-giving power and peace of the inbreathed Spirit. New life given not given for their comfort and assurance alone, but new life which gives them a mission, work to do in the world. "As the Father has sent me," Jesus says to them, "so now I send you."

Unlock the doors. Go. Go forth for God. Go to the world in peace, love, strength, and joy. As a newly created missionary people, empowered by the peace of Christ and the inbreathed Holy Spirit, we are to go forth as we are called, as we are sent, to carry the forgiving, transforming love of God into every place and into every heart.

This inbreathed Spirit may take us into places we had not dreamed of going, into new life we had not ourselves envisioned. Life itself will open new doors into new beginnings, new relationships, new seasons. And through it all, as Easter unfolds in our lives and in the life of the church, we will find that Christ himself will come to us, again and again and again, to renew his gift of peace and to breathe into us anew the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is in this spirit that I invite us now, this morning, to hear some news from Pastor Robert and the Chair of our Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Dick Crawford.

Rev. Robert English: *It is with excitement and sadness that I announce to you all that my family and I will be moving to Cincinnati, Ohio, in June. As you may remember my wife, Rev. Allison English, is an Episcopal Priest and she has accepted a position as the Senior Pastor of Calvary Episcopal Church in Cincinnati. I am anticipating and awaiting an appointment in a local church in the West Ohio Annual Conference.*

This is a big move for our family which brings us closer to our extended family, including our daughters' grandparents, who live just a short drive away in Indiana. This is bittersweet for us. We are leaving behind Santa Monica FUMC which has been our

church home for the last 10 years. Thank you for all of the love and support you have shown me over the years. You have allowed me to grow with you as we have engaged in this work of ministry together. For this and so much more I give thanks and praise to God. I hope that you will hold my family in your prayers during this time, but also this congregation, the clergy and your lay leaders as the Holy Spirit works through our appointment process to guide your next pastor to you all.

Dick Crawford: As Chair of our Staff-Parish Relations Committee, I would like to ask the members of the Committee to stand so that you might see them and feel free to go to them with any questions you may have. We will be working closely over these next weeks with Patricia and our District Superintendent as our bishop and superintendents discern and prepare to send to us a new pastor.

Rev. Patricia Farris: This will be a time of transition for us all. It comes with sadness because we love Robert very much. It comes with happiness for him and his family and for his and Allison's new congregations. And it comes with a bit of trepidation as we wonder what's next for us. So, hold Robert and his family in our prayers, all the congregations, and all of us, breathing in the breath of life and embracing, in the midst of it all, Christ's gift of peace.

Notes:

D. Cameron Murchison and Gail R. O'Day in *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Vol. 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2008.

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