

The Breath of Jesus
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"He Breathed on Them"

Those words are written in John 20:22. Usually we pay attention to all the other parts of John 20. Jesus rose from the dead and began to show Himself to His disciples; to Mary Magdalene; the Two on the way to Emmaus; to Peter; the disciples in the upper room. They were huddled together in fear, the doors were locked. They had heard the stories but were not sure what to believe. And then Jesus was there, right there among them. He said, "Peace be with you," and showed them His hands and His side. And He sent them to bring forgiveness and the Gospel of salvation-His perfect life, death, and resurrection as a triumph over sin-to the world.

But there is this one little part. "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'..." (John 20:22)

That's a very vivid image this year. We have had to think about masks, social distancing, sheltering at home, and so many things shut down. But, "He (Jesus) breathed on them". This is not describing Jesus standing at the other end of the room and going, "Haa." One of my Seminary teachers told our class how people in the Middle East like to be so much closer to each other when they talk. He said that when they want to speak a blessing they will get in real close and, "bathe you in their breath." As the blessing goes on you will sometime have to inhale.

When you hear the verse, "He breathed on them," do not think of Jesus standing far off. He is being close, giving a blessing and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The word for Spirit and the word for breath is the same in Hebrew.

We are in the middle of a time of being so careful of breath, and closeness, and still worried about getting something from someone else's breath. And then we read, Jesus "breathed on them." Exactly!

The scientists tell us there are bits of virus we could "get." It could be dangerous. It could bring death. What Jesus breaths on His disciples is bits of the Word of God. "Receive the holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven ..." (John 20:23) Bits of the Word of God, given by the breath and words of Jesus bring life. These are pieces of God's Eternal Word. They get into the soul and they bring life. They get into the deepest parts of our heart and they change us.

And then, with the words and the Spirit of Jesus within them, Jesus prepares them to spread His Gospel. Fifty days later came the gift of the Holy Spirit, giving languages and spreading the Gospel. Everyone who caught it (3,000 that day) was changed. The disciples went out breathing out the breath Jesus had breathed into them, breathing out bits of the eternal Word of God. It continued to spread, person to person all over the world, bringing faith and eternal life everywhere. And it hasn't been stopped yet!