

**Sunday, April 28, 2019 – Second Sunday of Easter**  
**“The Breath of Life”**

John 20: 19-31

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Story Applied Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Before more modern definitions revolving around heartbeat, brain activity or the strange news a couple weeks ago of researchers reanimating brain activity in dead pigs, the oldest, truest historical way to differentiate death from life is breathing. Breath as an indicator of life is just that significant, and not just among religious types. For instance, there's a boring, empty looking test tube on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, MI. Why, you ask, is this empty glass test tube on display? Well, it isn't quite so empty, after all. It contains the last breath expired by Thomas Edison. The phrase “breathed his last” shows up in the Passion Account to mark Jesus' death and is a common euphemism in modern English for dying. Many of us here have had the experience of watching a dear loved one die and that memory of the last breath is seared into our memories, significant as that moment is.

The breath of life is a very old concept, all the way to the beginning – Genesis describes God fashioning Adam out of the ground – the word Adam, in fact, is Hebrew for ground or dirt. His life is accomplished by God breathing life into His nostrils – the inanimate is animated. It was the crowning achievement of God's creation – creatures made in His image, given the charge to have dominion – be good stewards and proper caretakers of everything else that He had just made, the personal, intimate cherry on top of it all God doing mouth to mouth on something dead and making it alive, and not in the creepy mad scientist fashion of Frankenstein coursing electricity through his hodgepodge monster harvested from deadstuff in a graveyard – when God creates, He makes things new!

It's not just a Christian viewpoint that sees the world this way – as Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers in Athens he discussed God as the “unknown God” the Greeks had set up

to worship, discussing him as the one who gives all men life and breath and everything else. Our breath, our life is a gift from God.

That first man Adam brought death into his own life and into the world by His betrayal of God and His promises. Sin introduced a flaw into what God made perfect. The self-sustaining breath of God breathed into humanity will decay over time. The body so perfectly formed bears diseases and injuries and succumbs to age until one day, whether suddenly and traumatically or slowly over time, each of us will breathe our last. And we know that about our sin.

Jesus' disciples played out that sin they inherited in their own way. Judas betrayed Him. Peter denied him. John ran away. All of them scattered. After His death, they hid. It's where we find him in the reading – Easter night, locked away in this room and then Jesus appears. He's alive, He's breathing, it's not some ghost or apparition – it's His living, breathing body right there with them. And then, even as He removes their sin for abandoning Him He charges them with something that reverberates through His Church to this very day.

He breathed on them. God breathed on them. God made something new – these men dead in their sins, dead spiritually, breathing in the body on borrowed time had God breathe. It's an act of God's creation, creating something new. "Receive the Holy Spirit."

When I forgive your sins on Sunday, in the stead and by Jesus' command, it's this text where Jesus teaches – them, and us, to do exactly this. I'm not merely reminding you of something Jesus once did on Easter night 2,000 years ago. The ongoing act of God's creation – reanimating dead sinners through forgiveness of sins and making us alive into something new – is happening RIGHT HERE IN THIS ROOM! Jesus commandeers these sinful lips and lungs and breath and air. Molecules reverberate, projected from my diaphragm and ripple unseen through the air into your ears and interpreted by your brains and it is, thousands of years on, the very same effect and breath of Jesus discharging this authority to His church to forgive each other's sins. In the words "I forgive you all your sins" Jesus' breath is sending the Holy Spirit to you in real time. The breath that animated Adam and forgave the disciples is moving through

this very room! New creation is taking place – you’re being resuscitated, restored to God and back to normal human living.

It may have been awhile for some of us, but we’ve all been children before. When children do something wrong they’re afraid because they know they’re “in trouble.” Normal life is on hiatus because they know their parents are angry at them. Will they get a lecture? Will privileges be taken away? And since parents aren’t perfect themselves, sometimes children do suffer disproportionate to the offense. But maybe most important of all, when you’re in trouble, the question that most terrifies you is, “Will things ever be normal again?” On second thought, maybe you don’t have to be a little child to know what it’s like to feel fear over that question. When your child is appropriately restored and they hear words of forgiveness, they know that family life is going to continue and they’re welcomed in it. They don’t have to check off a ledger and check off the sin – they can relax because they’re comforted by the promise.

God’s words of forgiveness comfort us and promise us that we’re part of His human family. He breathes, creates new back into us and makes us right again. Thank God for that breath of life that forgives us and creates us new all over again. In Jesus’ name, Amen.