

John 20:19-23

April 24, 2022

Man breathes to live. God lives to breathe. If you were to gather a handful of dust and breathe into it, nothing would happen, except that you might sneeze and blow the dust everywhere. But when God took dust and breathed into it the breath of life, man became a living being. He breathed His life into man. God lives to breathe.

“Because I live,” says Jesus, *“you shall live also.”* Jesus did not rise from the dead for His own sake, but for yours. Jesus lives, not unto Himself, but unto you.

In our text we see His disciples huddled together on Easter evening. They are fearful. They are doing little more than simply collecting dust. Hiding behind locked doors, they are, indeed, lifeless like dust.

But Easter is a re-creation. All things are made new in Jesus’ resurrection. And so, just as God did when He created man, Jesus now does in re-creating him. He breathes out the Holy Spirit upon His disciples and they are given life, new life, His life, the resurrected life in Christ.

What happened to the old life? Sin took care of that. The man and his wife did not drop dead on the spot when they sinned against God in the Garden. But they did die. Death is separation. Their sin separated them from God. It locked them away from God and out of Paradise. We see them doing what the disciples are doing on Easter evening. Hiding. The man and his wife were hiding from God among the trees of the Garden. But God came to them just as Jesus comes to His disciples who are hiding behind locked doors. And to the man and his wife, God breathed once again. He breathed out to them the word of absolution, of forgiveness. He gave them the promise of the Savior.

Man breathes to live. With our nostrils we breathe in the air around us. It’s a non-thinking habit. We do it automatically. And it’s a good habit. We breathe to live. Everyone who is alive right now is breathing.

When Jesus came to His disciples on Easter evening, they were breathing. Proof that they were alive. And yet they were lifeless. They were fearful. They were hiding. They had locked themselves in. In a way, they had returned to dust.

But God lives to breathe. Jesus came to them to breathe life back into them. *“Peace be with you,”* He said. With His mouth He spoke life into them. But not through their nostrils. Through their ears. The disciples breathed in, with their ears, what Jesus was breathing out with His mouth.

All of you here this morning are living. Your breathing is proof of this. You are breathing in, with your nostrils, the air around you. But are you not also breathing with your ears? Because just as Jesus was breathing upon His disciples the breath of life, His resurrected life, so is He also today breathing upon you that same resurrected life. This life is for you just as it was for the disciples. *“As the Father has sent Me,”* Jesus tells them, *“even so I am sending you...if you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven...”*

Jesus breathed out upon His disciples the peace of God, the forgiveness of their sins. And He told them not to hold their breath. As He breathed out this new life to them, they were to breathe it out to others. They were to forgive the sins of all who repent.

And that same forgiveness is for you. Do you see me holding my breath this morning? No. With my words, which are Jesus' words to you, I am breathing upon you the resurrected life in Christ.

We need this life as much as the disciples needed it. For sometimes we, too, lock ourselves in, away from others, away from loved ones, away even from God. There are times when we, like them, are fearful. Just like them, there are days when we do little more than simply collect dust.

But God knows what to do with dust. He lives to breathe. To breathe into you Jesus' resurrected life. To re-create you, returning you to your baptism into Christ where you died with Him to sin, and also were raised with Him to life.

What Jesus breathed upon His disciples is, for us, assurance. "*If you forgive the sins of anyone,*" He said, "*they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld.*" Sadly, it is true that there are sinners who refuse to repent. Their sins are not to be forgiven. Not unless and until they repent. Let us, therefore, never live lives of unrepentance. For what is withheld here on earth is withheld in heaven also.

But what is forgiven here on earth is forgiven in heaven also. How can you know that your sins are truly forgiven by God in heaven? Jesus gives, here in our text, and in two other Scriptures, the authority to forgive sins to His Church and to those who are called to be pastors in His Church. When your sins are declared to be forgiven by the pastor, in the stead of Christ and by His command, you can have absolute assurance that your sins are forgiven in heaven also.

And so, breathe in with your ears this wonderful assurance. Yes, dear sinner, your sins are forgiven. God is at peace with you. The marks of the nails and spear in Jesus' flesh are proof of this. Paradise is no longer locked away from you, and it's because your sins are forgiven here on earth and in heaven also. Amen.