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 Year C Easter 2 April 24, 2022  
 Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia  
 Gospel of John 20:19-31

Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Jesus is the door to new and abundant life.

In today’s Gospel it is the first Easter day but the disciples really don’t get it yet. They are rattled. Their door is locked shut for fear that they may be next. That actually makes sense. That fear is logical. But that fear, the hiding, the betrayal, and the despair, also closes the door on Jesus. When we hold those feelings, it closes our hearts to what Jesus is offering us. But on that first evening of the first Easter, Jesus was not having any of that from his disciples.

In that house where the disciples gathered in fear, listening for men outside, breathing shallowly, Jesus appeared and he breathed on them. But the original Greek verb used here is *emphysao* (em-foo-sow), which means to breathe or blow into. *Emphysao* is the same verb used in the beginning when God made man from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. In this house, Jesus breathed the breath of abundant life into the disciples. Why did he do it? Because Jesus was creating new life. We can almost think of it as divine CPR, for in this act of rescue everything changed for the disciples. What was broken sprung to new life.

Deep fear becomes deep peace.  
 Betrayal becomes wholeness.  
 Opposition becomes harmony.  
 Hiding becomes connection.  
 Despair becomes communion.

The disciples rejoiced, and this is what Jesus wants for all of us. When we accept the Christ’s breath into us, we are changed. We change how we love and how we forgive. We change how we see the world. To you, is the world merely a tableau of bad with a few splotches of light and goodness on it? In my lifetime, I have met many people who believe this. Or is it a tableau of light and goodness with some edgy splotches of bad that still needs to be healed? As post-Resurrection, post-Ascension, post-Pentecost followers of Christ, I hope you see that the right answer is the latter.

But Thomas didn’t have the benefit of our position God’s salvation history. He didn’t have the breath yet. He was still up in his head. He was still trying to work it all out. Isn’t that still true for so many of us? I know it was for me, especially in seminary. I was all up here. (point to head) It took a congregation to bring me into my heart and truly connect with Jesus through them.

But back to Thomas, how does he get from his mental machinations to the joy of his siblings in Christ? Jesus loved Thomas so much, that he returned again, just for him. And he let him do what his mind needed: to physically touch Jesus’s wounds.

I don’t know if you ever feel envious of Thomas and other apostles in this scene. To touch Jesus. To take in his breath. Receive all that personal attention. The good news is that yes, God breathed into Adam, and yes, Jesus

breathed into the disciples. Also, Jesus breathes into us, for we are all the new creation. The creation that sees the world as designed for lightness, freedom and abundant pastures, but still has a number of edges to be healed. When you receive communion today you will touch Jesus and Jesus will fill your being as you consume his body and blood. Then you will go out into the world, knowing that, no matter what happened this past week, you are revived as a part of new creation once again.

There are some that believe that the dismissal is the most important part of our worship. If you think about it, the gathering, the liturgy of the word, the liturgy of the table, it all supports one short but hope-filled command: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. What if Jesus breathes this message to you as you leave church today:

From now on, I am working through you. From now on, if you want to touch me, touch one another because you are all connected through me.

It is in those touches that so many sharp edges in our world can be healed. It is in those touches that the divine rescue does its work. But what about those who we know are suffering but can't be reached. What about those who are far from abundant pastures and from us? Remember always that we are people of prayer. Prayer is a divine touch. Pray that hearts are open to receive Christ's love. Pray for Christ's breath of peace to go in to their lives and stirs up a new way of being. God is doing a new thing on this planet. Do not ever doubt that you have what it takes to be a part of it. To use a short adaptation from St. Patrick, here is why:

Christ is with you

Christ is before you

Christ is behind you

Christ is beneath you

Christ is above you

Christ is on your right

Christ is on your left

Christ is in you