

Getting your breath back

John 20:19-31

Sitting with those we love as they are dying, we listen as the heartbreaking music of the breath slowly ebbs and falls in longer spaces, returns in a quickened rush, ebbs and falls again and finally slips into stillness. Breath is the marker of life and the cessation of breath an indicator of death. When we're hit with bad news we have the breath knocked out of us. When we've overexerted our bodies in physical activity or emotional stress we need to pause to get our breath back.

I can imagine that evening gathering on the first day of the week. It would have been hard to breathe out of grief and fear. There was an empty tomb, a nothingness where the fullness of the murdered body of their leader should be lying and some strange words of Mary about seeing him and speaking with him. Words need breath to carry them, and the dead don't breathe. So lock the doors. Keep Quiet. Lock The Doors.

Jesus came and stood among them and his first word to them was "Peace". Here the creative breath of God – the *ruach* - that had first spoken order out of chaos, light out of darkness, life out of nothingness, speaks peace into the gathered grief and fear. He not only speaks but he breathes on them. The one whose breath had been taken by a suffocating death breathes on them. He puts the breath back into them in the gift of the Spirit so they can breathe. Not only for themselves but for others, a breath of forgiving, living life into those who are immobilised by grief and fear, who have been locked out of life.

But Thomas isn't there. Maybe he can't make himself leave his room, get up off the floor and gather with the others. Maybe his grief is too overwhelming and he needs to huddle in the solitary space of his own making. We've all been there.

A week later Thomas is back with them, and the door is shut this time, not locked, the fear is abating. Jesus appears again speaking peace and gives Thomas what he needs to believe, the offer of entering his wounds, still gaping; open, embodied, divine suffering. Thomas finds the abundance of breath he needs to exclaim, 'My Lord and my God!' He has found life again in the presence of the one who is life.

The writer of John's gospel goes on to tell us that this has been written so that we, who were not there in the room with the wounded, resurrected, Spirit of Peace-breathing Jesus might come to believe, and that through believing we might have life.

There are times when we have the breath knocked out of us for all sorts of reasons; when a loved one dies, when each day is a struggle and we feel locked out of life or when we are simply tired and weary. Sometimes just the sheer glory of God is breath taking. Whatever it is, I wonder what would happen if you imagined yourself back in that room on the first day of the week and felt the Spirit-breath of the risen one breathing life into you.

And if you're looking for wounds to touch; the bodies of teenage boys in Gaza, the lives of those seeking asylum that we have detained indefinitely, the homeless, lonely and marginalised people in our town...

What do you need to believe? How might you get your breath back? How might you breathe for others so they might know the life that conquers darkness?

Blessings on this day of resurrection,
Rev. Jennie Gordon
April 8, 2018