

## *Heart of the Matter*

### *“Breathing with Jesus”*

[John 20:19-23](#)

If you find someone who is unconscious, what do you think needs to be done first? Yes, check if the person has a pulse. Try to feel your pulse by placing two fingers at pulse points on your neck or wrists. The pulse you feel is the beating of your heart. As a child, your pulse rate might range from 90 to 120 beats per minute. As an adult, your pulse rate slows to an average of 72 beats per minute. Anyway, without our heart beating, we would die within a few minutes.

Here are some amazing facts about the human heart:

- Our heart is a busy organ. It beats about 100,000 times a day and 35 millions times a year. So, during an average lifetime, the human heart will beat more than 2.5 billion times.
- The blood our heart pumps travels a total of 12,000 miles a day – 4 times the distance across the United States from coast to coast!
- The heart is not that big. If you are a child, your heart is about the same size as your fist. If you are an adult, it’s about the same size as two fists. But, it’s indeed a mighty organ that sustains our lives.

But, there is another sign of life you can check on one’s body. Yes, breathing! We go through our day breathing normally and yet not noticing it at all. But, without lungs that are properly working, our lives can be quickly jeopardized. Without your lungs, your body would not be able to take oxygen from the air or remove harmful carbon dioxide from your body. As we are aware, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing are among the common symptoms of the novel coronavirus because it affects the lungs. And, sadly, many of the victims of COVID-19 die of lung failure.

Here are several interesting facts about the human lungs:

- An average person takes 15 to 20 breaths a minute, around 20,000 breaths per day, breathing an average of 13 pints of air every minute.
- Children and women breathe faster than men
- The air we breathe contains 21% oxygen, but our body uses only 5%, and the rest is exhaled.
- Your lungs are not the same size. Your right lung is larger than your left lung to make space for your heart.
- Our lungs are made up of tube-like sacs, and they are the only organs in the human body that can float on water.
- This one is hard to believe. If our lungs were opened flat, they would be the size of a tennis court!

Now, I want you to be aware of your breaths. Have you noticed that, in your breathing, there is a rhythm of inhaling and exhaling? Between the two, which one do you think is more important? Let’s find out. Take a deep breath. Hold it until you no longer can. And, when you exhale, continue it until you no longer can. Can you tell which one is more important – inhaling or exhaling? Of course, you can’t because they both are equally important. To live, you have to both inhale and exhale, and our body knows how to coordinate the two. Breathing, this essential process of life, is so natural that you do not even notice it most of the time!

Breath or breathing is an important image in the Bible. The Hebrew word, *Ruach*, is translated as breath, spirit, and wind. In the creation stories recorded in the book of Genesis, God's *Ruach* hovers over the waters before the universe is created (Genesis 1:2). And, "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the *Ruach* of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The very first breath of life taken on earth was not anyone else's but God's breath! In the vision of the prophet Ezekiel, the *Ruach* of God revives dry bones in a valley (Ezekiel 37:5). The Psalmist proclaims, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the *Ruach* of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, the *Ruach* of God moves through Jerusalem and gives birth to the church.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus, the risen Christ, appeared to Mary Magdalene early in the morning of the first day of the week when she went to his tomb. And then, as we heard from today's scripture reading, when the evening came, Jesus' followers were together behind locked doors for fear of the political and religious authorities. The story of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus ends with this: "Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And, she told them that he had said these things to her." Clearly, they had heard about the empty tomb of Jesus and his appearance to Mary. But, they were still filled with fear and were hiding.

In their midst, Jesus appeared and said to them, "Peace be with you." A moment later, he said it again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." The risen Christ revived their crushed spirits and gave them courage to go out into the world with the news of Easter.

Easter does not deny the reality of death. The resurrection of Jesus does not simply mean the happy ending to the agony of Good Friday. Despite all our modern technology, people still get hurt. Despite all our advanced medical knowledge, practices and treatments, people still get sick and die. The current pandemic is proof of that. There is no magic wand that can make our pain and suffering disappear from our lives. Believing in the resurrection of Jesus does not take away fear of death from us either. Our struggles have not ended because of Easter. So, we are afraid in the face of sickness and suffering, destruction and death.

But, just as he appeared to his disciples when they were hiding behind locked doors, Jesus, the risen Christ, comes to us as we are sheltered in place and breathes upon us, too. It is the promise of Easter: In a world of suffering, pain, and grief, God is with us. Even beyond death, God will be with us. As Jesus breathes upon us, as we breathe with him, our spirits are revived, and we gain strength and courage to face our fear. We gain strength and courage to live in the midst of the challenges our lives bring to us. As Jesus breathes with us, we come alive and ready to be sent into the world.

I invite you to take time for intentional breathing this week, inhaling and exhaling deeply. Breathe with Jesus, the risen Christ. Taking in his breath, hear Jesus saying to us, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" The Holy Spirit we are given is the breath of love and compassion, the breath of healing and restoration, the breath of life and joy, the breath of peace and hope. Imagine God breathing in and through you, surrounding you with love and peace, giving you strength and energy, and connecting you with our broken yet still beautiful world.

The breath of the coronavirus brings people death and sickness. But, God's *Ruach*, the breath of Jesus, brings us forgiveness and reconciliation, healing and restoration, new life and transformation. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know

where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). May the Spirit of God which Jesus breathes upon us, free us from fear and give us peace.

In 1878, Edwin Hatch, an esteemed Anglican minister and member of the Oxford University faculty wrote this beautiful prayer that was later turned into a hymn.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,  
Until with thee I will one will, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,  
Till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God, so shall I never die,  
But live with thee the perfect life of thine eternity. Amen.

10 years later, Robert Jackson wrote beautiful music for Professor Edwin’s prayer. Let us sing together this hymn of God's *Ruach* that still moves our hearts today.