

## Breathing Lessons

John 20:19-31

We usually assume that the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was given at the beginning of time by Yahweh when the Universe was created out of *tohu bohu*, the Dark Void. The Holy Spirit is wind, the Holy Wind, the Primal Wind the wind that creates, the Breath of God.

Here in John 20 Jesus breathes on his disciples. The word for breath in Hebrew is the same as the wind. Jesus is creating a post-crucifixion, post-resurrection, new life for his disciples. He is giving them New Life, his life, life living in him.

Breath is the essence of all things, it is the essence of Life. In Hebrew theology, a human becomes alive when he or she draws her or his first breath on their own. That is the definition of life.

Jesus is teaching his disciples how to breath. He is teaching them to in-spire and re-spire life again in this new reality. However, the disciples are living in fear.

The house where Jesus appeared to his disciples in John 20 isn't specifically identified in the text. The passage just says:

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders...” (John 20:19)

So, we do know a few things:

- It was evening, on the day of the resurrection.
- The disciples were gathered together.
- The doors were locked because they were afraid.
- Jesus suddenly appears among them.

But whose house it was remains a mystery. That said, there are some educated guesses and traditions:

1. **The Upper Room:**  
Many scholars think it could be the same Upper Room where Jesus had the Last Supper. In Acts 1:13, the disciples are later found in an upper room in Jerusalem, and tradition holds that they used that as a regular gathering place after Jesus' resurrection.
2. **House of Mary (Mother of John Mark):**  
In Acts 12:12, there's mention of the believers gathering at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, in Jerusalem. Some have speculated that this might have been an early meeting place for the disciples, possibly even during or just after the resurrection appearances.
3. **A Private, Unknown Home:**  
It could have simply been the house of one of the disciples or a sympathetic follower—someone offering a secure place to hide and regroup in the chaotic aftermath of Jesus' crucifixion.

They needed a "safe-house" because the same oppressive realities that hunted down and killed Jesus are still there for them. They fear the Romans. They fear the Jews, their own kind. They fear everybody. Is this any way to live? Is this any way to spread the good news of the life giving, death conquering power of Jesus. They will not be able to spread his message if they continue to live like this.

So, Jesus here breathes on his disciples, "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

This moment is deeply symbolic and theological. Here's what's going on:

### **1. Symbol of New Creation**

Jesus breathing on the disciples echoes Genesis 2:7, where God breathes life into Adam. Just as God gave physical life to humanity, Jesus is now giving spiritual life—a kind of re-creation. It marks the beginning of the disciples' new life in the Spirit.

### **2. Imparting the Holy Spirit**

Although Pentecost (Acts 2) is often seen as the major outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this moment is more personal and intimate. Jesus is giving the Spirit to empower the disciples for their mission—especially

as he is about to leave them physically. Some scholars see this as a “pre-Pentecost” or symbolic gesture representing what will fully come at Pentecost.

### **3. Commission and Empowerment**

Right before he breathes on them, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The breath is directly connected to that mission. He’s not just sending them—he’s equipping them.

Now after Jesus imparts his breathing lessons upon the disciples he has one more thing left to do... he needs to reassure Thomas that all is well.

After Jesus breathes on the disciples there is someone missing, there is a lost sheep so to speak, that is Thomas. He was not present for this meeting.

“But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.””

That’s pretty nice of them, isn’t it? They threw Thomas under the bus. Notice that Jesus did not offer a response to the disciples’ tattling on Thomas. He keeps silence. All the remaining disciples minus Judas need to be brought back into the fold.

Jesus keeps silence to them regarding Thomas. John writes here, “A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”” Jesus allows Thomas to examine his crucifixion wounds and all is well.

Here is a question for us to ponder, “Does Jesus need to forgive Thomas?” After all, he did say a week earlier “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”” Was this an example of Jesus putting those words into practice?

The short answer is NO, Jesus doesn't need to forgive Thomas, because Thomas didn't sin by doubting. But let's unpack that a little, because it touches on something deep about Jesus' character and how he deals with our struggles.

**Doubt is not the same as disobedience.**—Thomas says in John 20:25: “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands... I will not believe.” That's doubt—but it's honest doubt, not rebellion or betrayal. Jesus doesn't rebuke him. Instead, when Jesus appears to Thomas, he says:

“Put your finger here... stop doubting and believe.”

But there's no anger. No “how dare you.” Just invitation and grace. It's as if Jesus says: “You needed this—so here I am.”

**Jesus meets us in our doubt.**—Rather than needing to forgive, Jesus seems to understand. He honors Thomas's journey, even though it was slower than the others. And in fact, Thomas ends up making the strongest confession of faith in the Gospel:

“My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

That doesn't sound like someone who needed forgiveness—it sounds like someone whose faith was just born deeper and more real than ever.

**The bigger message is that God's grace is greater than our performance.**

Jesus isn't keeping score—He's forming disciples. So instead of needing to forgive Thomas, He simply shows him love, and that love transforms Thomas.

If you are pondering about this from a more personal or reflective angle—maybe seeing yourself in Thomas or wondering how Jesus handles your own doubts—that's totally fair. And the message is still the same. Take a breath...learn to breath in the resurrecting grace of Jesus.

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April 27, 2025