

FEAST OF PENTECOST (28 May 2023)

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:19–23 – NRSV).

Introductory notes

General

This text follows immediately on the encounter between Mary of Magdala and the Risen Lord – see John 20:11-18: "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her" (20:18). We can assume it is the same "disciples" who are huddled in a locked room "for fear of the Jews". Did they not believe Mary? Had the truth not yet been able to penetrate through the traumatizing effects of Friday?

Specific

Jesus came and stood among them: There is a whole new way of *bodily being* reported here. The Risen Lord is visible but not constrained by material objects – "the doors were locked". This is not a discussion about physics but a proclamation of a new order. Similarly, "he showed them his hands and his side". (Luke mentions hands and feet – see Luke 24:40.) However, this second statement contains the crucial truth that the risen one is also the crucified one! Jesus' death and resurrection has opened us to see and know and experience what was once unavailable to us. The reign of God has arrived. The Cross is the beginning not the end.

"Peace be with you": The greeting is repeated. We recall Jesus' earlier promise in 14:27-31 ("Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way") and 16:32-33 ("I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!") "Jesus' 'Shalom!' on Easter evening is the complement of 'it is finished' on the cross, for the peace of reconciliation and life from God is now imparted Not surprisingly it is included, along with 'grace', in the greeting of every epistle of Paul in the NT" (D A Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991, 647).

As the Father has sent me, so I send you: This repeats 17:18-19: “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth”. The disciples are part of the very mission that Jesus receives from the Father: “Here it is the perfect obedience of the Son that is especially emphasized (*e.g.* 5:19–30; 8:29), an obedience that has already been made a paradigm for the relation of the believers to Jesus (15:9–10). Jesus was sent by his Father into the world (3:17) by means of the incarnation (1:14) with the end of saving the world (1:29); now that Jesus’ disciples no longer belong to the world (15:19), they must also be sent back into the world (20:21) in order to bear witness, along with the Paraclete (15:26–27)—though obviously there is no mention of incarnation along the lines of 1:14, and any parallel must be entirely derivative. In so far as Jesus was entirely obedient to and dependent upon his Father, who sealed and sanctified him and poured out the Spirit upon him without limit (1:32; 3:34; 4:34; 5:19; 6:27; 10:36; 17:4), so far also does he constitute the definitive model for his disciples: they have become children of God (1:12–13; 3:3, 5; 20:17), the Spirit has been promised to them (chs. 14–16) and will soon be imparted to them (*cf.* notes on v. 22), they have been sanctified by Christ and will be sanctified by God’s word (17:17) as they grow in unqualified obedience to and dependence upon their Lord.” (D A Carson, *op cit*, 648-649.) Central to being a disciple is being sent.

he breathed on them: The Greek verb, *emphysaō*, is also used in the Septuagint version of creation story in Genesis 2:7: “the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”. Breath and breathing are signs of life and it all points back to the Creator. Listen to the following texts:

“Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.’ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.” (Ezekiel 37:5-10)

“Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6)

“When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit (breath), they are created; and you renew the face of the earth.” (Psalm 104:29:30)

“Their heart is ashes, their hope is cheaper than dirt, and their lives are of less worth than clay, because they failed to know the one who formed them and inspired them with active souls and breathed a living spirit into them.” (Wisdom 15:10-11)

“For (Wisdom) is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal

light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.” (Wisdom 7:25-26)

“ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

“But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding.” (Job 32:8)