

John 20:19-23

BREATH OF LIFE AND PEACE

When we think of the Day of Pentecost our thoughts probably go, as they do in many cases, straight to the spectacular, the dramatic. If you were to ask many Christians what they think of when they hear the word, ‘Pentecost’, they would probably answer with; flames of fire, the sound of a rushing wind, the sudden ability to speak in different languages, 3,000 baptised people in a day. Some Christian churches still today like to have these spectacular signs of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work as a part of their worship and their lives. As humans, by nature it is the obvious and the spectacular we are often drawn to. But before the rushing wind of Acts 2, before the tongues of fire and the bold preaching, there is another moment of the coming of the Holy Spirit. A quieter one. A gentler one. A deeply personal one.

Our Gospel reading for today tells us what was happening for the disciples on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. John, one of those disciples, tells us that at this time the disciples are locked away in fear. The doors are shut. Their hearts are shut. Their future feels shut. And into that room, into that fear, Jesus comes and stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” (19b) Then He breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”(22b) What John tells us about here is another coming of the Holy Spirit, one that Jesus had been promising before His death, and this account reminds us that the Holy Spirit doesn’t come into our world once, but continually. And how does Jesus bring the Holy Spirit to the disciples? Through His breath: The breath of life. The breath of peace. The breath that sends.

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, we stand in that same room with the disciples. We hear the same words. We receive the same breath. And we are sent with the same mission. John tells us that he and the other disciples were afraid. Not a little bit anxious. Not just unsettled. They were terrified. Their world had collapsed. The One they loved, trusted and followed had been crucified. Their hopes had

been shattered. And even though they had heard rumours of Jesus being alive again, they didn't yet know what to do with them. Fear locks doors. Fear locks hearts. Fear shrinks our world.

And into that fear, Jesus doesn't tell them off. He doesn't lecture. He doesn't say, "Pull yourselves together." He says, "Peace be with you." This is not a polite greeting. It's not the ancient equivalent of "Hello." This is the peace from God which is received as it is spoken. The risen Jesus speaks the very thing they do not have and cannot create for themselves. Jesus speaks **shalom**—God's deep, restoring, reconciling peace. Peace that forgives the past. Peace that steadies the present. Peace that opens the future. And notice: Jesus speaks peace twice. Once to calm their fear. Once to prepare them for their mission. The peace of Jesus is not simply the absence of trouble. It's the presence of God. It's the assurance that the crucified and risen Lord stands with us, breathes on us, and sends us.

And we need that peace today. We live in a world of locked doors—sometimes literal, often emotional. We carry fears and worries about our families, our health, our finances, our future. We carry wounds from the past and worries about what lies ahead. And into all of that, Jesus still comes. Not with condemnation, but with peace. Not with demands, but with the gift of His love, and the assurance of His care in all we go through. Not with fear, but with life. Pentecost begins with peace.

After speaking peace, Jesus does something astonishing. He breathes on them. This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus breathes on anyone. And John uses a word here that echoes Genesis 2, where God breathes into Adam and he becomes a living being. It echoes Ezekiel 37, where God breathes life into the dry bones and raises a whole people. Jesus breathes on them the same Spirit who moved over the formless earth at Creation in Genesis 1. Jesus is doing new creation. Jesus is raising a new humanity. Jesus is forming a new community.

Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into His disciples. This breath is not just air; it is life. This breath is not just comfort; it is power. This breath is not just for them; it is for the world. The Spirit Jesus gives is the Spirit who: brings faith where there is doubt. Brings courage where there is fear. Brings forgiveness where there is sin. Brings unity where there is division. Brings hope where there is despair. The Spirit is the breath of God that animates the Church.

And this breath is for you. When you were baptised, God breathed His Spirit into you. When you hear the Gospel, the Spirit breathes peace into your heart. When you receive Holy Communion, the Spirit strengthens you with Jesus' life as with the bread and wine you receive the body and blood of His sacrifice. When you forgive and are forgiven, the Spirit restores relationships. Pentecost is not just a story of the past. It's the ongoing life of the Church. It's the breath we live by. It's the breath that fills our lungs today.

After speaking peace and breathing the Spirit, Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (21b) This is breathtaking. The mission of Jesus becomes the mission of His people. How did the Father send Jesus? In love. In humility. In truth. In sacrifice. In compassion. In peace. And now Jesus sends us in the same way. Pentecost is not only about receiving the Spirit. It's about being sent by the Spirit. We often highlight the amazing transformation of the disciples who were once locked away in fear now went out and boldly told the message of Jesus to the world. The disciples who once hid behind closed doors become witnesses who open the doors of the Kingdom. The disciples who once trembled become people who carry peace into every corner of life. And so do we. We are sent into our families with the peace of Jesus. We are sent into the places where we work, study, and enjoy ourselves, with the breath of the Spirit. We are sent into our communities with the love of God. We are sent into our conversations, into conflicts, into moments of need, carrying the peace that Jesus has breathed into us. It can be daunting; it often is daunting. Remember, you don't need to have all the answers. You simply need to be someone who has received the peace of Jesus and is willing to share it. Sometimes that sharing is about forgiveness. Sometimes it is about listening. Sometimes it's about praying. Sometimes it's about serving. Sometimes it's about speaking the hope of Jesus into someone's fear, or simply sharing in a very down-to-earth way what our faith means to us. Pentecost is not a one-day event. It's a way of life.

So, what does this mean for us today, here on the Gold Coast and northern NSW, in our own lives, in our own congregation? It means that Jesus still enters our locked rooms. He still speaks peace into our fear. He still breathes His Spirit into our weary lungs. He still sends us into the world as bearers

of His peace. And the world needs that peace. Not the fragile peace of human agreements. Not the temporary peace of distraction. Not the shallow peace of pretending everything is fine. The world needs the peace that comes from the crucified and risen Jesus. The peace that forgives. The peace that restores. The peace that breathes life. And that peace is in you. The Spirit who hovered over the waters at creation, the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, the Spirit who filled the disciples with courage—that same Spirit lives in you. You are not sent alone. You are not sent empty. You are not sent without peace. You are sent with the breath of God in your lungs and the peace of Jesus in your heart.

On this Day of Pentecost, hear again the words of Jesus: “Peace be with you.” Peace for your fears. Peace for your wounds. Peace for your future. “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Breath for your life. Breath for your faith. Breath for your mission. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Sent with love. Sent with courage. Sent with peace. May the breath of life fill you. May the peace of Jesus steady you. And may the Spirit send you out as bearers of God’s peace in the world.

Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What do you think of when you think of the day of Pentecost, or the coming of the Holy Spirit in general? The big and dramatic signs and happenings? Or the small quiet everyday occurrences?
- What does the peace Jesus brings mean to you? How do you experience it in your life? Are there ever times in your life when you struggle to know and experience the peace of knowing God’s love and forgiveness, or when you feel a long way away from it?
- How do you experience the breath of life, of new Creation, which comes to us through the Holy Spirit? Is there a time when you particularly feel this? Are there times when you yearn for the knowing of God’s love in this way, but it seems a long way from you?
- Jesus now sends us, like He did with the disciples, in the power of the Holy Spirit to share this peace and life. Do you always find it easy to share and show your faith in the situations God places before you? When and where do you struggle with this? Do you find it easier to trust in God’s assurance and guidance, or focus more on what you see as your own struggles and failings? Bring this to God in prayer, asking Him to help you see and respond to the opportunities to share your faith in your life.

Pray: thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, and for the peace and life the gift of our faith now brings to us. Ask for continual guidance and strength to live and share this faith in our lives.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
24.05.2026*