

John 20:19-31

“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

Mary Magdalene came to the disciples with unbelievable news. She told them, “I have seen the Lord.” Then she gave them the message she received from Jesus. The Lord said to her, “Go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” When she told them the message Jesus gave her for them, I can imagine how they were feeling. Some of them were still feeling anxious and wondering what was going to happen to them. And then she said Jesus was ascending to God the Father. Ascending to the Father? How could he be ascending to the Father? Where was the Kingdom the Messiah was supposed to bring? They were all probably wondering if Mary Magdalene really saw Jesus, or was she imagining things? They were all feeling down, depressed, and distressed. They were experiencing tension and pressure. There was no life in them. Jesus had died physically, but they were dead emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

They had lost everything. All their hopes, dreams, plans, had disappeared. But they had each other. They could comfort one another. That evening of the resurrection, they all gathered and locked the doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this,

he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Jesus knew what the disciples were going through. He knew they were in a dead zone of feeling hopeless, feeling miserable, feeling lost and feeling empty. Where his mission ended was where their assignment began. He came to redeem the world and announce the Kingdom of God. When Jesus said, “It is finished,” on Good Friday, he was saying the work of salvation was done. Now it was time to build God’s Kingdom on earth.

When Jesus appeared among the disciples, he said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he said, “Peace be with you,” he was saying, I make you whole again, and I give you wholeness. They were broken but Jesus made them whole again. No matter how many broken pieces our dead dreams and lives become, Jesus can put us back together again.

After saying, “Peace be with you,” he breathed on them. So many people need Jesus to breathe on them today. So many things are dead in our lives. Just as Ezekiel saw a valley of dry bones, there are valleys of dry bones. In those valleys of dry bones there are many things we recognize. Plans are dead. The future is dead.

Hope for a better life is dead. Things we were excited about no longer give us joy.

Some people do not know they live in the valley of dry bones. If things you do and places you go do not glorify God, they are dead. And you live in the Valley of Dry Bones if people you hang out with have no interest in spiritual things or things about God's Kingdom, they are dead, and you are hanging out in the Valley of Dry Bones. You do not need to spend time with them. If ideas you have and books you read do not draw you closer to Christ, they are dead. They belong in the Valley of Dry Bones.

Some years ago, I did a study on a book called, "Autopsy of a Dead Church." When a church is dying or dead, it is because the people are spiritually dying or dead. The author of that book mentioned some things that can cause a church to become sick and die. He mentioned being disconnected from the community as one of the things that can make a church become sick and die.

If a church is dying, they need Jesus to breathe new life into them. Today, many people are hungry for something more. The church must be ready to seek out the young people and the new generation. We must seek the direction of the Spirit to know which direction to follow. Jesus said the harvest is plenty, but the laborers are few. Just as Jesus breathed on the disciples, so, he is breathing on us today to get more involved in reaching others for the Kingdom.

When God breathes on us, we will have peace over fear. The disciples were living in fear. Before he breathed on them, he said "Peace be with you." A group called The Society of International Law based in London has said that during the last 4,000 years, the world has enjoyed only 268 years of peace. It seems we human beings love to fight. When there is peace, some people will not be happy until they start a fight. But Jesus came into the world as the Prince of Peace. He told us in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

In Philippians 4:7, Paul wrote that the Peace which Christ gives passes all human understanding. The peace of Christ is not like the peace the world gives. The peace the world gives is when there's confusion and the police arrive, then people stop fighting because of the presence of the police. The peace of the world is when you have enough money in the bank to pay your bills, when the test results from the doctor say you're all clear and you are negative for any disease. Or if we have a tank full of gas to start the day and all the tires on the car have air in them.

But let the police leave, or you find someone has attacked your bank account and stolen your money, or the doctor's office calls to say, "Please come in to discuss your test results; something is wrong." What if you go out to leave for work and you find you have a flat tire, or someone came the night before and drained off all

the gas from your car? Suddenly the peace we enjoyed will suddenly vanish and panic appears. Fear takes over. This is because the peace the world gives is temporary and momentary. It is here for a brief while and then when things go wrong, we lose that peace. People lose their peace because of selfishness, impatience, and anger. But when Jesus breathes on us, we will have peace, real peace. The peace that Christ gives us is confidence in Jesus to know that he is with us, even during the most difficult times. So, when we lose our world peace, we can rest assured our Lord is right there with us. When we have the peace of Christ, we will not lose our minds when things don't go as we expect.

We have so many dead things in our lives. Just as the breath of God brought the bones in the valley to life in Ezekiel, so **when Jesus breathes on us, He will give us peace over fear. Jesus will also give us the power to forgive.** In verse 23, Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit. Then he added, "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

When Jesus brings the dead things to life within us, we will find it easy to forgive others and receive forgiveness. Forgiveness is a central part of our life in Christ. I heard of a woman who was not a Christian and lived her entire life without Christ. Before she died, she said, "There is one thing Christians have I wish I had. I have nobody to forgive me." Forgiveness sets us free from unnecessary burdens and gives us release.

There was a man who suffered from many health problems: headaches, skin troubles, his stomach was upset all the time, and he could not sleep. He went to visit his doctor. After all the tests and listening to him, his doctor discovered that one basic cause of his many health problems was the burning anger that he felt toward his brother. Their parents died and left them a huge amount of money, and his brother oversaw the money. His brother had misused the funds so badly that the man had been cheated of what he was supposed to get. The man became so angry that he refused to forgive his brother. The longer he held on to the grudge against his brother, the more his health problems increased. It was only after he forgave his brother and let go of the hatred, he had towards his brother that his health problems reduced and disappeared. Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." When we forgive others, we set them free, and we set ourselves free.

We have many dead things in our lives. **When Jesus breathes on us, we will have a true profession of faith.** When Jesus appeared to his disciples, one of them was missing. We do not know where Thomas was or where he went but he was not there. When the disciples told him they saw Jesus, he refused to believe and said to the other disciples, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

One week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

When Jesus breathes on us, we will be blessed with a profession of faith. To have a profession of faith means our faith in Jesus will have deep roots. With a faith that runs deep, we will be able to publicly declare our faith and live it out no matter where we go and who we are with. Jesus said in Luke 9:26, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." In Romans 1:16, Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." Some people will make fun of you and your faith. But do not let it bother you. Keep on believing. Keep on keeping on. Jesus is real. You are like a driver with their GPS on and a clear sense of direction. Those who do not know Christ are lost. You are no longer in the valley of dry bones. You are a child of the resurrection.

When Jesus died, the disciples lost everything. When Jesus rose from the dead, he came, and he breathed on the disciples. Today, Jesus is breathing on us. **When Jesus breathes on us, we now have peace over fear, we have the power to forgive, and we have the power to profess our faith.** The Holy Spirit will help us become the type of disciples the Christ wants us to be. God bless us all. Amen.