

## Pentecost 2020

### Talks

John 3: 5-8 & 20: 19-22

#### Talk one (John 3: 5-8)

- > The first Bible passage I chose for this morning is part of a conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who had come to visit him one night.
- > Jesus talked about being born again which, unsurprisingly, Nicodemus didn't understand at first – what we have just heard is Jesus' explanation.
- > Jesus speaks of the wind and of the Spirit and, if you have a Bible with footnotes, you will notice that in the original Greek the word used in verses 6 & 8 can mean *either* wind or spirit.
- > Jesus is talking about how the Holy Spirit can be like a wind.
- > Wind just blows, it has an effect, it can make things move it can make inanimate objects appear to come to life just as the Holy Spirit gives life and energy to people – the life in all its fulness that Jesus embodies as God with us.
- > These days we have the benefit of scientific knowledge that people in the first century didn't possess, so we know exactly how wind works. It's all to do with global pressure systems and air masses moving to equalise these pressure patterns.
- > There are hugely advanced computer modelling systems that predict, with a fair degree of accuracy, where the winds will blow and how strongly – so when it comes to just wind – we know how it works.
- > But if we change the use of the word and refer to the Holy Spirit, then meteorology is useless – as no one, other than God, knows where and how the Holy Spirit will arrive and effect she will have.
- > We will think some more about the theme of the Holy Spirit being like a wind a little later. But for now, I'd like to share a video I took of my windmill (I used to love them as a kid). Along with the video is a poem.

#### Talk two (John 20: 19-22)

- > A couple of weeks ago on the 17<sup>th</sup> May I talked about the passage in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John that recounts Jesus promising that the Holy Spirit will come to help the disciples.
- > This is how Eugene Peterson translates what Jesus said:

15-17 "If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be *in* you!

> This is typically obscure John's Gospel – it needs to be thought through to uncover its remarkable meaning.

> In current times the idea of having something living in you is a frightening prospect as most of us remain scared stiff about catching Covid 19 and its consequences for our health – well, apart for the masses of people crammed together on the beaches last Monday that is!

> And hearing a story of Jesus breathing on people – you can't do that! And what about wearing a face mask – and don't forget the laws of social distancing – Jesus would have been really in trouble these days!

> Flippancy aside what Jesus did for the disciples was the exact opposite of putting them in danger, he was, in fact, giving them the gift of His life.

> Jesus sharing his breathing with the disciples is how he gifted the presence of the Holy Spirit in John's account. And the story from Luke in Acts also tells of a strong wind blowing through the room where the disciples had gathered on the day of Pentecost.

> I think taking a very quick look at the science of breathing will help us understand just how powerful this idea of the breath of Jesus going into the disciples is.

> Breathing is essential to keep us alive. When we expand our chest and lower our diaphragm our lungs fill with air. The oxygen in that air is then absorbed into our blood which our heart pumps to where it is needed. And it's needed in every cell in our body because oxygen is an essential part of the process our cells use to make the energy that keep us going.

> The by-product of that chemical reaction in our cells is carbon dioxide that our blood then carries back to our lungs which gets dissolved out and is expelled when we breathe out.

> And that is what you and I are doing at this very moment – and most of the time we are entirely unaware of it.

> Breathing is life.

> And as we are all now too well-aware when that process goes wrong it can have catastrophic consequences – as the horrible effects of the Covid 19 virus have shown. We now know the vital importance of how ventilators keep people alive by helping them to breathe when they are no longer able to do so for themselves.

> We must breathe to carry on. And that is what Jesus enabled the disciples to do by sharing His breath that is the Holy Spirit.

> In his commentary, Samuel Cruz, point out that the disciples were “overcome with fear and despair” after the crucifixion of Jesus. They couldn't go on anymore. I'll quote what Cruz says next:

“Jesus' return to visit with his disciples appears to have had a clear mission of fortifying them to continue his work. First of all, they would need peace to counter the turbulence of his death, and secondly, they needed evidence of his resurrection to restore their faith. Jesus dealt with these two pressing issues immediately. He did

not simply return to celebrate his resurrection, but to prepare them as he sent them forth to continue the work he had begun.”

> Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

> This was the moment of renewal, this was the moment of rebirth for the disciples - this is exactly what Jesus had been talking about to Nicodemus.

> The breath/ wind of the Holy Spirit of God, given by Jesus gave the disciples a whole new lease of life.

> They were now breathing in time with their Saviour and Creator. That is how important the Holy Spirit is!

> As we are a part of the Reformed tradition of Christianity I’d like to mention that for Martin Luther the Holy Spirit was of the highest importance as he taught that the presence of the Spirit is the only way that we can be the people God wants us to be. None of us can do this on our own - we need the Holy Spirit within us to give us real life.

> Just breathing in and out keeps us going – but to live the life in all its fullness that Jesus tells us about, we need to accept the gift of Jesus – tune our breathing with His and become the people we truly can be.

> This is our *re-birth*, our *renewal* – and not only each one of us, but as church – as a community too.

> We don’t know how this works – this is not for scientific enquiry – this is about our *living faith*.

> Just as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, we cannot control the wind of the Spirit or predict the effects and timings.

> With each and every breath we take, there are possibilities for us to continue the Kingdom work Jesus set in motion.

> It may be as gentle as a whisper, or powerfully active – but never destructive and life threatening like a hurricane which is where the metaphor breaks down and should not be taken literally.

> We still don’t know what lies ahead in the future, nor do we know the parts we may play within it. In the meantime, we can all use our breath to keep in touch, especially with those suffering or in need of encouragement, both our sisters and brothers in Christ but our neighbours near and far too.

> I urge each one of us to make a conscious effort to remain open to the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit – to be open to the risk of following Jesus when the way unfolds before us.

> I’ll conclude with a thought from Revd Janet Hunt on this passage who takes us right back to the very beginning when God spoke creation into being, people included:

“We can’t help but be taken back to the creation account in Genesis where God’s own breath becomes Adam’s (*and Eve’s*) breath and thus, our own.

- > Through Pentecost the risen and ascended Jesus lives on within each one of us as
  - there as close as our very next breath.
- > The breath of Jesus dwells within and gives us life.

Amen