
BREATHE ON ME BREATH OF GOD

Sermon for Harvest Thanksgiving/Confirmation Sunday 2021

John 20:21-22; Acts 2:2, 4

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 20:21–22 and Acts 2:2, 4: **Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”**

²² **After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit!**

² **Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting... ⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are blessed with a double celebration here today. We are thanking the Lord for all the daily blessings He gives to us, and we are thanking Him for bringing Thomas to this day to make his own confession of faith, and to receive the Lord’s Supper for the first time.

What a great day! I am reminded of Psalm 104:33, “*Let me sing to the LORD throughout my life! Let me sing praise to my God all my life!*” We truly are blessed. God has given us so much, and He continues to give. Today we stop to count our blessings. Certainly, this is a good thing! It’s good that people acknowledge good gifts. God feeds and cares for us, and this is what we pray for in the Fourth Petition, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Luther explains that “*God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people.*” “*Even to all evil people*” just goes to show how much God takes care of mankind. If we could only be aware of how much God gives to us that we do not deserve, we would be moved to give thanks to Him. If we were aware of how much God withholds from us because He knows it will be bad for us, we would be moved to give thanks to Him. If we were aware of how God intends to use all things for the good of those who love Him, even those things that drive us to our knees and makes us afraid, we would be moved to give thanks to

Him. There is so much to be grateful for to God. So much that no one could sufficiently thank Him enough.

But above all, we thank Him for our salvation. We thank the Lord for His Gospel message, for the wonderful Word of forgiveness. We thank Him that He takes our poor miserable souls and breathes new life into them with His Spirit. When God breathes on us, His life comes into us. His breath gives life. When God formed Adam out of dust from the earth, God breathed into his nostrils and the man became a living soul.¹ Ezekiel saw the vision of a valley of dry bones. God breathed and they came to life.²

Today is a great day of thanksgiving, and it's a great day for you Thomas, a day in which we have all gathered to celebrate your confirmation. It's a great day for you and your parents and family members - a day I hope you have been looking forward to. It's a great day for me too, a day anticipated and planned for after we spent many hours learning together of the great love Jesus has for us. But today is also a great day for the entire congregation - a day to welcome you into fuller participation and responsibilities in your church. A great day, most importantly of all, because this is a day when the Holy Spirit will breathe on us.

The breath of God gives life. One of the key passages is from the story of Easter.

Though Jesus had risen from the dead, the disciples were still hiding in their locked room. Suddenly Jesus was standing there among them. He said, **“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”**²² **After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit!”**

The Lord breathed on His disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit. That was the beginning; more spiritual power would follow. Jesus told His disciples, *“I am sending you out to make disciples of all nations, but don't go until you get the power the Holy Spirit will provide.”* On the day of Pentecost, 50 days later, He finished what He started on Easter night when He breathed His new life into them.

The account in Acts 2 says that while the disciples were all together, **“Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting...⁴ They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.”**

The same word is used for wind and Spirit in both the Greek of the New Testament (*pneuma*) and the Hebrew of the Old Testament (*ruach*). In the imagery of the Bible, when God breathes, a wind comes out of His mouth, the wind of the Spirit that gives

¹ Genesis 2:7

² Ezekiel 37:4-10

life. When does God breathe on us to give His Spirit and life? I can think of four particular times: in baptism, in confessing Jesus, in confirmation, and in living the Christian life. Let's look at each of those.

First, in **baptism**.

In His dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus told him that the life we receive at our natural birth does not bring us into the kingdom of God. In order to become part of God's kingdom - to have God's life in us - we must be born again. Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3, 5). That happens when God connects His Spirit, His Breath, to water in baptism. The new birth, said Jesus, is from "*water and Spirit,*" not of the water and of the Spirit as two separate experiences. Water and Spirit work together in the new birth. Jesus' words echoed the cry of John the Baptist: "*Repent!*" "*Be baptised!*" "*The kingdom of heaven is near.*"³ These words revealed what had to happen for Nicodemus to find the answers he sought with his night-time visit.

We need this heavenly rebirth to enter or even see God's kingdom. As Jesus said at another time, "*The kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:21). God's kingdom is God's rule of grace in our hearts. Through baptism the Holy Spirit connects us with God's ruling love. He works a new birth, a birth that makes a person a child of God and a member of God's kingdom. The apostle Paul said the same thing when he wrote, "*He [God our Saviour] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5).

Many years before Paul, Ezekiel had prophesied of the LORD: "*I shall pour out clean water on you, and you will be clean ... I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you I shall **put My Spirit inside you** and cause you to walk in My Statutes, keep My Decisions and put them into practice*" (36:25-27). The Spirit, the Breath of God, works the new birth through the water of Baptism.

Second, God breathes on us to give His Spirit and life in our **confessing Jesus**.

After we are baptised, we continue to learn what happened at our baptism and what it means for our lives. We learn that we are sinners and need forgiveness of sins. We learn that Jesus, God's only Son, has died on the cross to pay for our sins. We understand that when from the cross Jesus said, "*It is finished*," He meant His work of saving us. Make no mistake, God the Father wanted His Son to die. He had sent Him

³ See Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:4

⁴ John 19:30

to pay for your sin and my sin by dying in our place, for the “*wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). When any of us say, “I believe, I trust Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord,” God has breathed on me. St. Paul says, “*No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:3).

God breathes on us at baptism. Our confession of faith is the result of God’s breath, now a third important time for God’s breath is at **confirmation**.

When we are ready to make a public confession of the faith into which we were baptised, when we have been taught the faith, and when we are ready to promise to be faithful to our Lord, we are confirmed. What does that really mean? To be confirmed means that something is made firm, made certain and sure.

How are we made firm at confirmation? As individuals we confess our faith and make a promise. Does that do it? The pastor puts his hand on your head and speaks a blessing. Does the pastor make you firm? The congregation prays for you. Does that do it? All of this is involved, but it is God who does the confirming. Listen to these words from the confirmation liturgy: “*the almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with His grace to life everlasting.*”

“*God . . . who has given you the new birth of water and of the Spirit.*” God breathes and the Spirit “*strengthens you with His grace to life everlasting.*” God doesn’t force His breath on you. You can turn away. When someone who has just eaten a whole lot of fresh garlic talks to you, you have to turn away. Garlic breath is not very nice. You have to turn away. God doesn’t have garlic breath, but you can turn away when He breathes on you. Unfortunately that’s what many do. When they do, it means the vows they made at their confirmation were *meaningless*. Fortunately, God provides forgiveness for our “meaningless vows” as well as for *broken vows*. Thank God that His vow to us in baptism and in His Word is never meaningless. Thomas, in this Word, and in light of your Baptism, God is breathing His Spirit, His life, into you on this, your confirmation day, to strengthen you and help you keep your vow.

Finally, there is a fourth time that we think about God breathing on us. He gives us His life **as we live out the Christian life.**

Confirmation is not a final fix that takes care of us for the rest of life. Sadly for many, when they “get done” they put away their Bibles, catechisms, and hymnbooks, only to become weaker and weaker in their faith and witness to Christ.

That’s one way the devil tries to lead us astray. There are many others. There are the temptations of the flesh. Peer pressure from ungodly friends. The attitude of knowing

you are doing something wrong, but “*everybody is doing it, so I’ll join in.*” Everybody is doing it. That’s another way the devil gets at us.

The devil has his own ways to get at each of us individually: rationalisations, hard times, real temptations, rejection and ridicule for our faith. What can we do when this happens? We can pray, “*Breathe on me, breath of God*” and go to His Word and Sacraments, because through them God breathes His life into us again and again. Jesus is not physically present to breathe on us as He did in that room to His first disciples, but He still breathes on us in Baptism. He breathes on us through His Word, the holy Scriptures. He breathes on us as we receive His body and blood in our Lord’s Supper.

Thomas, as you get ready today to make your confession of faith and speak your vow; as those of us who have been confirmed remember our own confirmation; and as all of us think about how God has breathed His life into us, listen again to the words of Scripture: **Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.** ²² **After He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit!”**... **“Suddenly a sound like a violent blast of wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting...”** ⁴ **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.”**

May the Lord God continue to breathe His Holy Spirit upon us, until the day comes when we hear those words, “*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter your master’s joy!*” (Matthew 25:23). Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR HARVEST THANKSGIVING

God our Father, You have created the universe in great wisdom, and sustain it by Your powerful word. You are good to everyone, and have compassion on all that You have made. We enter Your house of prayer with thanksgiving, and come before You with songs of joy. We thank You for the many blessings and joys You lavish on our lives. We thank You for soil and seed, sunlight and rain, health and strength, machinery and technology, and every other blessing by which You give us our daily bread. You have given us a plentiful land, rich in resources for agriculture, mining, and industry. You have blessed us with education and skills to use these resources for the good of our country and its people. Although You do not always spare us from trouble and dark days, we still must confess that our cup of blessing is overflowing, and so we

praise Your name. Make us continually aware of Your goodness, O Lord. Increase our trust that in all things You are working for our good.

But, Lord, You not only care for our bodies; Your richest love is reserved for the salvation of our souls. Because You have revealed Yourself to us in Your Word, we know You in Your limitless grace, and live in the light of Your truth and love. We thank You especially for Your greatest of gifts: Jesus Christ our Saviour, and for all the blessings of the Gospel and the Church. Help us to appreciate fully these choicest gifts, and to produce in our lives a rich harvest of faith, goodness, and love.

Free us from every temptation to trust in uncertain things like material wealth. Free us from covetousness, envy, and jealousy. Increase our joy in what You provide, and make us content. Make us more sensitive to what others need. Give us compassion to help those who have too little, and the opportunities to share Your blessings. Let our service to others pave the way for witness to the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ Your Son. Teach us to use wisely the things You place at our disposal.

Bless and strengthen the poor and the hungry, those who cannot work, the lonely, the depressed, and especially those who are suffering because of their Christian faith. Give them all the generous help of friends, but, above all, strong trust in Your presence and care.

Guide the nations on earth, and particularly those countries whose people are desperately poor. Grant that all who look up to You for material blessings may find Your kingdom, and Your righteousness. Bless our country Australia with a united spirit and godly goals. Teach its leaders and its people to know, believe, and do Your will. Remove from us things that are unwise and harmful.

Continue to supply the spiritual needs of our families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.

O faithful and gracious Lord, today you are giving Thomas the special joy of publicly confessing his faith and renewing his dedication to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Give him Your strength and courage to make this confession with sincerity, and to fulfil it in the days ahead. Remind him of his baptism and of the covenant You made with him on that day. Keep him faithful until the end of his life, that he may obtain the heavenly crown. Keep him in Your grace and make his heart the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, so that He may direct Thomas in the paths of righteousness.

We offer You our prayers and our songs of praise, heavenly Father, in the name of Your dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and honour for ever.
Amen.

HARVEST THANKSGIVING

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹“When you enter the land that the LORD, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and live in it, ²you shall take some of the first from all the produce of the ground, which you will harvest from your land, which the LORD, your God, is giving you! You shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD, your God, will choose to make His name dwell! ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and tell him, ‘I declare today to the LORD, your God, that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us!’ ⁴Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD, your God! ⁵You shall make this response before the LORD, your God: ‘My forefather was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with few people and lived as a foreigner there. There he became a great, powerful and numerous nation. ⁶However, the Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us and imposed severe forced labour on us. ⁷Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our forefathers, and the LORD heard our cry. He saw our misery, distress and oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror

and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now, look! I have brought the first produce of the land, which You, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it down before the LORD, your God, and worship before the LORD, your God! ¹¹Then you shall be glad about all the good things that the LORD, your God, has given to you and your family, together with the Levite and the foreigner who is living among you!

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶In addition, I say this: **The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.** ⁷Each person should give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion! **For God loves a cheerful giver.**

⁸God can make all grace abound toward you, that you may always have all that you need in every way and may abound in every good work, ⁹as Scripture has said: **“He has distributed. He has given to the poor. His righteousness remains for ever.”** ¹⁰He who provides **seed for the sower and bread for food** will supply and multiply your seed and will increase what your **righteousness produces.** ¹¹You are being made rich

in every way that you may be totally generous. This is producing thanksgiving to God through us. ¹² This work, which you are doing in serving others, not only supplies the needs of the believers but is also overflowing through many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³ By this service, by which you prove yourselves, you are glorifying God for your subordinate confession of the Good News of Christ and for your generous contribution to them and to all people, ¹⁴ while they also long for you deeply and pray for you, because of the extreme kindness that God has shown you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd asked Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!”

¹⁴ Jesus asked him, “Man, who appointed Me to be a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

¹⁵ Then He told them, “Beware and be on your guard against all greed! For a person’s life does not consist in how plentiful his possessions are.”

¹⁶ Then Jesus told them a parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, ‘What am I to do? For I have no place to store my produce.’”

¹⁸ “Then he said, ‘This is what I shall do: I shall pull down my barns and build bigger ones and shall store my grain and all my other goods in them.’”

¹⁹ Then I shall say to myself, “Soul, you have many good things stored up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and enjoy yourself!”

²⁰ “However, God said to him, ‘You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you. Then who will get the things that you have prepared?’”

²¹ Jesus said, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”