

1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20: 19-29

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy

he has given us a new birth

into a living hope

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable,

undefiled, and unfading,

kept in heaven for you,

⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you rejoice,

even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,

⁷so that the genuineness of your faith

—being more precious than gold

that, though perishable, is tested by fire

—may be found to result in praise

and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸Although you have not seen him,

you love him;

and even though you do not see him now,

you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy,

⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith,

the salvation of your souls.

Those words of Peter remind me of one of the resurrection stories from the Gospel of John, which tells of when some of the disciples first saw the risen Christ.

You may recall how Mary Magdalene and Peter and the Beloved Disciple saw the empty tomb – and later how Mary Magdalene was the first to be unexpectedly delighted in Jesus' resurrection. She then ran to tell the disciples "I have seen the Lord!" But the disciples were afraid for their life and kept the doors locked.

But do you think a locked door – or a disbelieving mind – or a soul filled with grief - can keep out the son of God?

Nope.

Did Jesus break down that door by force?

Nope.

He came and stood with those whom he loved. Instead of berating them for not believing, he said, "Shalom" which means "God's peace be with you."

²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples saw Jesus and were filled with joy.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you."

²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

In the Bible, the Spirit is often spoken of as a wind from God, *ruach elohim* - or the very breath of God.

I like to describe it as a warm prairie wind.

You know what I’m talking about.

It’s that wind that makes you want to literally go fly a kite.

It’s that wind that makes you want to get out the gardening gloves and the seed packets and open all the windows to blow out the dust of winter and blow in the dust of spring 😊 It’s **not** the wind that permanently bends your trees in one direction. Nope, not that kind of wind.

But I think the wind from God blows away the stuffiness, the pollution, the smoke - and we can think and breathe and see clearly again.

We can look at this story in John as a story of Pentecost. In it, the disciples receive the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit at the same time. They were, if you will, born again.

For some of us, the experience of being “born again,” or “born from above,” or “born of the Spirit” (whatever we call it), is dramatic and happened in a particular time and place.

Others of us have come to this point more gradually. Still others of us must have this experience every spring when the wind blows as it chooses, and it chooses to gust in us again.

Either way each experience with God’s Spirit is real and valid.

But receiving this wind of God – this Spirit – being born again – doesn’t just stop with taking in a deep breath. No, Jesus told those whom he loved in that locked room, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Get out of this locked room and go and spread God’s love.

It seems as if there’s always a doubter in our midst – and poor Thomas will always be remembered by this story. Poor Thomas missed out on that first breath of fresh air. Maybe he was sent out to get food – we don’t know.

A week later, the disciples are gathered together in a locked room again – this time Thomas is in their midst – and what do you know, Jesus meets them there again. Thomas gets his chance to see the risen Lord, and to touch his healed wounds and then proclaims, “My Lord and my God!”

With this confession of faith, Jesus speaks past Thomas and the rest, he moves beyond the doors of time and addresses us. “Listen,” he says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have come to believe” (20:29).

Sound familiar? “Although you have not seen him, you love him,” Peter later wrote; “and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy...”

Peter is describing that breath of fresh air - the new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit.

How else can we love and believe in someone we have not physically seen?¹

Today we rejoice that the Spirit moves and blows and comes in through the cracks and opens up our locked doors and delights us by saying “Peace, be to you!” and “Receive the Holy Spirit” and then challenges us by saying, “I’m sending you out of your locked doors!”

Today we celebrate Andrew, Brandon and Zach’s commitment to following Jesus Christ; their promise to live in the kingdom. And we delight in God’s covenant to always be with them. Christ has breathed on them the Spirit and has empowered them to go out into the world to live in and participate in and trust in and share about God’s love for our world.

What will this look like for them in their life?

We don’t know, but we trust the Spirit of God – the Ruach Elohim to always be within them – riffling their hair, pushing them forward and bringing in the scent of the promise of new life. For these expressions of God’s spirit in their lives we pray. And for all Yahweh’s gracious gifts – in the past, now and to come - be praise forever more. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

¹ Ideas from “Moving Beyond Locked Doors” April 14, 1996 message. <http://rockhay.tripod.com/sermons/1996/96-04-14.htm>