



## Christ United Methodist Church

301 Wooster St. • Marietta, OH 45750 • 740-373-1512  
www.christumcmarietta.org

**Date:** April 28, 2019

**Sermon:** The Breath of Jesus

**Text:** John 21:1-12

**Speaker:** Pastor Don Archer

Welcome to the Sunday after Easter. One of my favorite Sundays. One of my favorite Sundays because, even in the absence of last week's crowd, last week's flowers, special music and other Easter-related experiences ... it is **still** Easter. Christ is still risen. The tomb is still empty. There are still those who believe and those who doubt. Today is as much Easter as last Sunday.

In this morning's gospel reading from John, we find the disciples behind locked doors, because they were afraid. The text says that they were meeting behind locked doors *for fear of the Jews*. My guess is that there were many reasons for their fear. In the midst of their fear, *Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."*

For me, this is the Easter reality. That in the midst of our fears ... Jesus comes and stands among us, stands with us, and somehow manages to replace our fear with peace. Not only does he stand with us when we are filled with fear, he is also present with us when we are filled with doubt and disbelief. And when we doubt, when we cannot believe, he does not argue, he does not ridicule or condemn ... he offers *peace*.

In fact, I believe that whatever situation we may find ourselves in, the risen Lord is present. Whether it is fear, doubt, loneliness, grief, anger, or a sense of being lost. Whatever we may be experiencing, Christ the Lord is Risen Today. And we do not have to see it to believe it. *Blessed are those who **have not seen** and yet have come to believe*. I will admit that it certainly helps when/if we **can** see, touch, hear, interact with the One who was crucified, dead, buried, and risen from the dead. The One who first offered peace to his frightened disciples. The One who breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and empowered them with the mission of forgiveness of sins.

For me, personally, it is in the act of forgiveness that I see, experience, the resurrection. It is forgiveness that reminds me that God's grace is greater than our sin. It is the emphasis on forgiveness that gives life to the church, the body of Christ. It is the message of forgiveness that is, in many ways, unique to Jesus and his followers. The breath of God, breathed on those first disciples, filled them with the Holy Spirit to enable them to *forgive the sins of any*.

I wonder this morning how our breath is? Minty fresh? A little stale? Heavy with coffee, cough drop, or last night's pizza? Is there any trace of the Holy Spirit on our breath? Is there any trace of the risen Lord on our breath? Jesus breathed on the disciples and filled them with the Holy Spirit. Is there any residual trace of that among us? Just as certainly as we detect garlic, onions, and ramps on

someone's breath, we can detect the breath of God? Did you know that? *Breath on me breath of God.* What does the breath of God smell like? It smells like forgiveness. People/Churches that practice forgiveness have God breath. We don't even have to get close to detect it. The breath of God, the breath of forgiveness can travel all around the world. It can also be detected on those closest to us.

All around us there are people who are struggling to breathe. People who are gasping for the air of forgiveness. Likewise, there are those who are holding their breath. Holding in, withholding the gift of the risen Lord, the gift of peace that comes through forgiveness. For the past forty years The United Methodist Church has been holding it's breath, trying to avoid conflict, division, and pain. We've been holding our breath for so long that we are turning blue. Unless we find the courage to breath we will most certainly die.

Today's gospel reading tells us that Jesus showed his frightened disciples his hands and his side, his wounds. He invited Thomas to touch those wounds. Upon seeing them, Thomas confessed: *My Lord and my God!*

What about our wounds? Do we have any? They aren't always obvious. Many of our wounds are internal. Wounds of the heart, mind, and soul. Many of our wounds are caused by love. The absence of love or the betrayal of love. Love leaves us vulnerable and when we are vulnerable, we can be wounded. That's what Good Friday was all about.

The wounds of Jesus are as clear and as troubling now as they were so long ago. The wounds of Jesus are visible in the desperate conditions in Venezuela. The wounds of Jesus can be seen in the countless refugee camps around the world. The wounds of Jesus are opened and exposed whenever events like those in Sri Lanka reveal the depth of hatred. The wounds of Jesus are clearly evident whenever we choose to withhold words of forgiveness. The wounds of Jesus can be found within the Church whenever we forget that *God so loved the world.* Meaning everyone.

Even now, a week after Easter, Jesus comes and stands among us, offering us peace and calling us to the work of forgiveness.

Are we withholding forgiveness from anyone? Are we refusing to hear/accept words/expression of forgiveness. Often times, the absence of peace in our lives can be directly linked to our unwillingness to forgive or to accept forgiveness.

*Peace be with you.* May we also hear him calling us to be those who continue the work of forgiveness. People with the Holy Spirit on their breath and the visible wounds that come from loving others even as we, in Christ Jesus, have been loved.

Amen.