

BACKGROUND

Body Language

Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples on the evening of the day of resurrection, when Jesus breathed God's Spirit on them. We, like Thomas, are given that same Spirit the disciples received that first Easter Day. The risen Christ is with us always, showing us the path of life in God's ways and empowering us to witness to God's saving love.

Focus scripture: **John 20:19–31**

On the evening of the day of the Resurrection, the disciples are hiding behind locked doors. Now that the Passover is over, the leaders are free to act against them. (The reference to the "Jews" here means the religious authorities who brought Jesus to trial; those in hiding are Jews also.) Jesus unexpectedly appears, saying "Peace be with you." This traditional Jewish greeting is now forever transformed by the presence of the risen Christ. Christians, in the centuries since, have greeted each other in this way.

In an echo of the creation story, Jesus breathes on the disciples and God's Spirit is given. The word used for "receive" the Spirit is the same word used in Communion – "take" and eat. This is one version of the story of the giving of the Spirit – a quiet room, a small band of Jesus' friends. Acts 2 offers a different account – sound like a rushing wind, tongues as of fire, and voices so loud that people on the street could hear.

However this gift of Spirit – promised by Jesus in John 14:15–31 – is given, the effect is the same. Disciples are empowered to act in Jesus' name. They are sent out to preach the good news. They are given authority to announce forgiveness in the name of Christ and to warn the community of the danger of continuing in disobedient ways ("retaining sin"). God's Spirit empowers the community to bodily and boldly take on the ministry and mission of Jesus.

Thomas is not present at this meeting with Jesus – we don't know why – and Thomas wants to see for himself. Thomas is not a "doubter," as some later interpretations depict him. Earlier, Thomas called on the disciples to go with Jesus (John 11:16). The other disciples did not believe Mary Magdalene's news of resurrection at first either, until they experienced it themselves. Perhaps an experience of the heart helps one accept the new reality of resurrection life.

A week later the disciples are again in the house. Is the first day of the week (Sunday) already being commemorated as the day of resurrection, a day when Jesus' followers gather to remember? Jesus comes with the same greeting of peace, and gives Thomas what he needs in order to believe. Thomas confesses his belief that Jesus is the risen Christ.

John concludes this passage with a statement of the purpose of this written record. These stories have been written so that all may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, God's anointed saviour.

The reading from **Acts 2:14a, 22–32** shows the transformation of the disciples from a frightened group in hiding to powerful witnesses to Jesus' death and resurrection. Peter preaches that Jesus completes the story of God's saving love. The resurrected Christ is the fulfillment of scripture. Peter quotes **Psalms 16** in his sermon. God protects and gives counsel; in God's presence there is fullness of joy.

In **1 Peter 1:3–9**, the writer gives thanks for the living hope that disciples receive through the Resurrection. Baptism is both a dying to old life and a rising to new life and hope. Like Thomas and the early Christians, we can believe and rejoice even though we have not seen the risen Christ with our own eyes.

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Jesus says to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe." Who has embodied faith for you? What would it mean for you – as an individual and as the church – to embody the ways of Christ?

REFLECTION

O God, we, like Thomas, were not in that room when Jesus first came among the disciples, breathing peace. Help us to know that the risen Christ is with us always. May we embody your grace and carry to a waiting world the good news of your saving love. Amen.

Breath prayers

The practice of prayer

Directions

Adults Matching the quiet or silent repetition of a simple prayer with our breathing helps to empty the mind of worries and opens us to God's presence. Here are some ideas for practicing breath prayers.

1. Spend a few moments sitting quietly, with your eyes closed, breathing in and out slowly, focusing on each breath.
2. Create a personal prayer, with each phrase at least five to eight syllables long, to encourage relaxed breathing. Or,
3. Choose a psalm or other scripture reading, saying one phrase as you breathe in, and the next phrase as you breathe out. For example:
Protect me, O God // for in you I take refuge.
I bless the Lord // who gives me counsel;
Therefore my heart is glad // and my soul rejoices.
You show me the path of life // in your presence there is joy.
(*Selected verses from Psalm 16*)

Young people Our minds whisper messages to us constantly throughout the day. People talk to us. We hear traffic noises. Breath prayers can help fill our minds with God's peace. Breath prayers are silent, so you can pray anytime, anywhere. Here are some ideas for practicing breath prayers.

1. Spend a few moments sitting quietly, with your eyes closed, breathing in and out slowly, focusing on each breath.
2. Create a short personal prayer (one or two sentences long) with words that say something that you hope for, or are thankful for. Make each phrase at least five to eight syllables long, to encourage relaxed breathing. For example,
O God, open my mind to peace // open my heart to love.
O God, be with me today // in what I do, in what I say.

Children Explain that breath prayers are like silent rhymes to God. We say the first half of our holy rhyme as we breathe in and the second half as we breathe out. Invite children to sit quietly with their eyes closed; breathe in and out together, counting quietly to five with every breath in and out. Then teach them the following simple breath prayer by reading each line slowly and quietly.

As you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be."
As you breathe out, say silently, "with me."
As you breathe in, say silently, "Peace be."
As you breathe out, say silently, "with you."

Doubting Thomas

John 20.19-31

Word Search Puzzle

L	O	C	K	E	D	O	O	R	S	T
C	R	E	T	A	I	N	E	D	P	I
Y	N	M	E	S	S	I	A	H	E	B
R	E	J	O	I	C	E	D	S	A	F
H	R	E	C	E	I	V	E	P	C	S
O	T	W	I	N	P	L	J	I	E	T
L	P	N	A	I	L	S	E	R	F	N
Y	F	A	T	H	E	R	S	I	E	M
T	H	O	M	A	S	P	U	T	A	S
F	I	N	G	E	R	S	S	R	R	B
C	M	F	V	I	P	V	K	M	Y	S

doors	locked	fear
Jesus	peace	disciples
rejoiced	Father	Receive
Holy	Spirit	retained
Thomas	Twin	nails
mark	finger	Messiah