

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

When We Are Locked Inside Our Upstairs Room

“Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

—The Gospel of John

By Ken Woodley

Who hasn't blown out a great gulp of air on a cold winter's day and seen their breath hanging there in front of them like an early morning mist?

But it can happen during Eastertide, too. “On this day three years ago,” Kim told me early this morning, reading from one of her journals, “it was 26 degrees when the sun rose.”

A day when the blooming petals of April were coated in frost.

Breathing, of course, keeps us alive, but our breath does other things, too.

Ironically—or, perhaps, tellingly—we can use our breath to both kindle and extinguish a flame. After putting another log on a barely burning fire, we blow on glowing embers, hoping to re-ignite the flames. But we also use our breath to blow out candles.

Breathing also fuels our voices, and what we say in this world travels much farther than our frozen breath. So we should be careful about what words we set loose into the lives of others.

The most amazing thing we can do with our breath, however, is to save someone's life through mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

And, in a way, that is what Jesus is shown to be doing in the verse above from the Gospel of John.

The disciples, minus Thomas, are cowering behind locked doors after the crucifixion of Jesus.

Frightened out of their minds. Scared out of their wits. Trembling in terror at any sudden noise that might mean the authorities were coming to arrest them and put them to death.

The breath of Jesus provides them with the gift of the Holy Spirit and releases them from the grasp of deepest anxiety. The breath of Jesus kindles the embers of his disciples into flames to bring light into the darkness of the world.

The breath of Jesus empowers them to boldly go where they have never gone before: out into the world around them without the comfort of Jesus by their side to spread the Gospel far and wide. As far and as wide as to us today. So, Jesus saved the lives of his disciples, then and now.

Clearly, Jesus would have won any contest my childhood friends and I had over whose breath could travel farthest on a winter's morning. The breath of Christ has been like the wind, blowing across the entire face of the Earth, thanks to those who do not keep the gift of the Holy Spirit for themselves but share it, through word and deed.

His breath is with us today, gently kindling us with God's love, empowering us to carry the message of that amazing grace out into the world through what we say and what we do.

The daily challenge is to ask ourselves before every decision: will this breath of mine kindle a flame or blow one out?

If we share the breath that Jesus has given us then we are breathing life into the world for more than just ourselves.

And the light of love will shine more brightly.

Especially for those who have been dragged by life into a moment of fear that there is no more light of love at all.

Just as Jesus so lovingly did for his disciples way back then.

And now.

Because sometimes it is us huddled in some "upstairs room" where we feel distant from Jesus, when the "hammers and nails" in our lives seem to have won.

When all of the flashing signs say "Crucifixion" and hopes for resurrection away from our troubles seem paved over.

When ancient pains of sorrow and anguish resurface and speak in the present tense.

At times like that, we will not see the breath of Christ by our side but if we put one foot in front of the other and leave that locked room we will surely feel it.