

# Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

*“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 taken a great gulp of air on a cold winter's day and then breathed out into the world and seen their breath hanging there in front of them?

I seem to recall my friends and I having contests, when we were kids, to see how far we could blow our frozen breath out in front of us as we walked to school on January mornings.

Sometimes I will still blow my breath out through pursed lips and re-create those childhood moments, just for the fun of it.

Breathing, of course, keeps us alive, but our breath is capable of 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 and make wishes on birthday cakes.

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 today's Gospel lesson from 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, and spreading 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, as a church and as individuals.

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

Always kindle. Always. The other way brings darkness.