

**“God’s Hongi” a sermon based on John 20:19-31 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin on Sunday 8 April 2018.**

In the gospel today God invites us to be the living Church of the risen Jesus Christ:

- A group of disciples who had locked themselves away are addressed by the risen Christ who is among them;
- His peace overcomes their fear;
- They face reality by being presented with the wounds of his body;
- Yet it is reality that leads to rejoicing at the presence of the wounded risen Jesus;
- And to them, behind locked doors, overcome by fear, devastated by crucifixion, he says “As the Father has sent me so I send you.”
- And he breathes on them – receive the Holy Spirit.
- And a week later he speaks peace again
- And Thomas proclaims – “My Lord and my God”.

This is not once upon a time. This is now. This is what church is. This is what worship does.

This is what the risen Christ does when his people gather. I give you my peace, he says, when we are tempted to fear. As the Father sends me so I send you, he says, when we are tempted to turn inwards. I breathe on you my own breath, the breath of Holy Spirit, he says, when we are tempted to go it alone and rely on ourselves.

If you forgive sins, they are forgiven, he says, when we are tempted to live in the past. Reach out your hand and put it in my side, he says, when we are tempted to pretend life is easier than it is, when we minimise harsh realities.

Blessed are you who believe when you do not see, he says, when we are tempted to demand proof and certainty of a narrow kind. Rejoice, he says, when we are tempted towards sourness.

To help us live resurrection, Luke describes a community that did it. They were of one heart and soul. No one claimed ownership of any possessions and they had everything in common. They witnessed to the resurrection.

No-one went needy because those who had land or houses gave to the apostles who sold the land and houses and distributed the money.

Luke earths the gospel in our day to day existence, in our buying and selling, in our possessions and purchases, in how we are church. This kind of church offers our world hope with bite, with body. This kind of church says – resurrection is real, now, here. How can today's gospel take hold of us with that impact?

I encourage us to pray this story through personally. Which of these words and actions of Jesus are for me?

Pray it through. I want to unpack an aspect of it now.

We know in New Zealand what it is to be breathed on.

Recently I was in the airport waiting for a person and a friend walked out of gate 9. I could tell what he expected of me. I stood up. No words were spoken. We touched foreheads and pressed noses. It was a hongi. Then we spoke. In the touching of foreheads and the pressing of noses, we share each other's breath.

It is a re-enactment of a Maori creation story.

The god Tane embraced the newly created and breathed into her nostrils. She then sneezed and came to life, creating the first woman in Māori legend, Hine Ahu One.

In the hongi, in the sharing of breath, the stranger becomes friend, the one apart becomes the one together. A sacred moment awakening the spirit of life among us.

On the marae, the hongi is one of the last acts in the process of welcome before people eat together. The visitors become one with the local people. Breath figures in one of our creation stories.

“Then the Lord God formed adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and adam became a living being.” (Gen. 2:7)

The words used in a creation story, repeated for re-creation. In resurrection a new world breaks through into our present world. The risen Christ breathes into us so we can live in the new world of Jesus.

Tihei mauri ora! Behold the breath of life.

Mauri is what we need to stay alive - the life among us.

Mauri ora - being fully alive.

Tihei mauri ora!

When has this happened to you?

I was called to the hospice, a friend was near death. He knew it. I knew it. We talked about it. I was sitting beside his bed, and we held each other's hand, and we were close, breathing each other's breath. He spoke of his struggles with faith, how his own personal struggles had thinned his faith. “You know,” he said, “all I am left with is Jesus and love.” “I think that might be enough,” I said. “Would you like me to pray?” I said. “Why don't we both pray?” he said. So, I thought, add prayer to the list: Jesus, love ... and prayer. And he prayed one of the most beautiful prayers I have ever been part of. Jesus was there breathing life. Tihei mauri ora!

Over the past week, and in just one week different people have spoken about their prayers for their family through tough times, appreciation for the generosity of people in this congregation, the joy people felt in visiting a person confined to their home, the strength people received by our affirmation of beliefs important to them, the encouragement people received from participating in worship last Sunday, the love a congregation felt from hearing of our congregation's support for them, and there was more. God breathes into the congregation the breath of life. Tihei mauri ora!

Jesus opens the locked room to fresh air. If the first disciples had stayed in that room, doors locked because of fear, it would not have taken long for the air to become rancid and toxic and stale. People can smell stale air and they turn away.

And can't we smell artificial air, when the people in the room are pretending to be what they are not, like rooms smelling from those automated censer machines.

By contrast, when Christ is present in a room, we can feel the peace and the joy, the breath of life.

We acknowledge our wounds and they give life rather than cause hurt to others. There is a sense of purpose because we know we are sent by God, sent beyond ourselves, to embody the gospel in the world.

People's sins are forgiven and not retained. The Holy Spirit is breathed into our lives and we thrive in that Spirit. We feel connected with the spirit of creation as it flows through us.

Disappointed people like Thomas recognise Jesus because they see costly love.

People are of one heart and soul. No one claims private ownership. Everything is held in common. No one is left in need. Tihei mauri ora! Behold there is life!

### **Prayer**

God of life, breathe your Holy Spirit upon us now, we pray, that we may be a community of resurrection, witnessing to your life in the world, proclaiming the hope we have found in you, being part of your work of re-creation, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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