

From Breath to Boldness by Carolyn Carter, 19 April 2021

Luke 24 : 36-49 & Acts 3 : 12-19

I have four 'R' words that I want to highlight – not the 'R' that has been in the news so much – but.....*Receive, Resurrection, Repentance and Revival.*

The scene in Luke 24 where Jesus meets the disciples after He's risen is also in John Chapter 20 – it says... *'When the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear..... Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."'*

In both accounts Jesus says 'Peace be with you' – they were probably slightly terrified to see the One that had been killed now appear inside the locked room where they were hiding – I think I would've been scared too! I don't think it helped their fear levels that He walked right through the wall! I love how Luke describes Jesus asking them for something to eat so that he can show them He IS REAL and not a ghost! But John adds another detail here not mentioned by Luke - Jesus **breathed** on them and said *'Receive the Holy Spirit'*.

It seems funny to be reading about Jesus breathing on the disciples when we are in this time of pandemic - where we want to avoid breathing on anyone!- But Jesus is imparting the Holy Spirit by breathing on them. Why did He do this? It seems a little bit strange?! But it is echoing so many references to God's breath of Life, from Genesis where God first breathed into Adam and he became a living being, to the Valley of Dry bones seen by Ezekiel where he was told by God to 'Prophesy to the breath' to fill them so that they will live.

Psalms 33 says *"By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."*

There's even the possibility that the very Name of God revealed to Moses in the desert was sounds that in Hebrew could only be articulated by breathing them – without the use of lips or tongue – the name of Yahweh (as we pronounce it)– could not be spoken because it was so Holy – being the Name of God – but perhaps it also literally could NOT be spoken only breathed! It raises the thought that if the Name of God is the sound of a breath in and out then we are repeating His Name every moment of our lives!

2 Timothy 3:16 says *'All Scripture is God-breathed'* – the word of God in the Bible.....and we talk about inspiration from the Holy Spirit – the word inspiration literally means 'to breathe in'.

Breathing is so vital for our life.....we have seen this in so stark a way this year. Just as our bodies need breath – our spirits need the living breath of God – the Holy Spirit – it's so important that we actively and intentionally receive Him into our hearts. Receiving can sometimes be the hardest thing to do. That is my first 'R' – **RECEIVE the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus taught that He IS LIFE - as God He imparts LIFE to them here - just as in the beginning God breathed life into Adam! He now breathes into them - THEY now have NEW life in Him – their spirits are alive to God – they are born again, brand new creations - to live for Him who IS the 'Resurrection and the Life'!

RESURRECTION is my next 'R' word that pops up in these readings.

What we've just celebrated at Easter is the pinnacle of our faith and the centre of history, nothing is ever the same again after this moment!

The disciples would never be the same either – they were transformed from a ramshackle group of downcast, fearful followers who's leader had been executed - into a band of fearless and devoted family who lived fully for God - walked and talked with great boldness about Jesus and his Resurrection wherever they went - as our reading in the book of Acts tells us.

The fact that many of these disciples gave their lives testifying to Jesus' Resurrection is such strong evidence for it being true – why would they lay down their lives for something that they knew was a falsehood?

It's important that WE too live in the light of this truth and have this hope firm and secure like an anchor for the soul (Hebrews 6:19).... and allow it to transform us too!

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

... we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Alsoin 1 Corinthians 15:16-19

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

Paul says that if Jesus is not raised our faith is pointless and we are still in our sins – that is how central the Resurrection is - because Jesus IS risen we are NEW creations and no longer IN our sins – yes we still make mistakes but it is no longer who we ARE – our identity - we are IN Him – seated in heavenly places with Him even as we walk on the earth as it says in Ephesians 2.

Jesus teaches us to pray from heaven's perspective 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' calls us to live as people of hope – communicating to the nations about the new life people can have because Jesus defeated death!

We are sent - just as much as those early disciples were – they were called apostles – which is 'sent ones' as Bishop Olivia highlighted on Easter Sunday.

Because we know the end of the story it is easy to forget that the Resurrection came so completely out of the blue, after the darkest day of the cross, and after a long Saturday where it felt like their hopes had come to nothing.

But God is always on the move – He brings new hope, even after the toughest of seasons - like the one we're walking through right now.

When Jesus walked into the room of FEAR they were in that day He opened their minds to understand the things that had happened in the light of the scriptures then told them what was about to happen next in HIS great story -

"repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

REPENTANCE is my third 'R' – repentance is mentioned in the passage from Acts 3 – Peter said to the onlookers - "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,"

Times of refreshing can ONLY come as we turn away from wrong motives, beliefs and actions, and

turn our hearts intentionally towards God and His goodness - seeking His ways and His presence. His face is always turned towards us! A key verse that I have heard repeated by so many over this time has been 2 Chronicles 7:14 - *"If MY people, who are called by my Name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face (which is the same word as presence) and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

This is not about people who don't know God – it's HIS people that He is calling to pray and humble themselves - then He will come! Humility is being aware of our need of God and walking in dependence on Him as Peter and John did here.

The Bible says that it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance – He is such a good Father and wants to give us good things – so that must mean that repentance is a door to those things! If we come to Him in humility, ending our striving for independence from Him, openly confessing our deliberate or negligent sins and also the sin of our land, our generation, our culture – then we will see Revival come in an amazing way!

And **REVIVAL** is my 4th and final 'R' – it's what the church across the world are crying out to God for. Times of refreshing! There's increasing expectation that we are on the verge of a move of God like we've never seen! The darkness has seemed to increase recently and that can only mean that God is about break through like the dawn as He always does.

He is the giver of LIFE, He wants to come and make dry bones in the desert live again, to pour out living water on the desert places – on all who are thirsty!

Revival comes to the thirsty. It is coming back to consciousness of God – His Holiness.

His Glory and power are seen in a new way. Encounters happen which lead to the hearts of others who are far from Him turning to Him in large numbers!

So Let's keep praying 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven' - that is what Revival looks like! In Revivals crime rates fall, people are healed, and families are restored! We need to see and experience again the power of the Spirit and the signs and wonders that followed the early believers, they were not meant to come and go – Isaiah 9 says – "of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end" - this is what we are called to be a part of – building His Kingdom, partnering with God to bring heaven to earth every day – right where we are, being available for Him to lead us to the lost, the least, the broken and hurting – stepping out in boldness as the disciples did after they were clothed with power from on high – the Holy Spirit He promised would be in them is in us too!

We can RECEIVE Him into our lives, live in the light and hope of the RESURRECTION, keep soft hearts before God and REPENT for the wrong in our world and pray for REVIVAL and times of refreshing to come – how we need Him to heal our land! Let's depend on God and the Spirit's inspiration in us – let's hold unswervingly to the hope we have in Him – walk humbly with our God and go out in boldness and love those in need around us - and be expectant for the new things God wants to do in a through us!