

# Ascension to Pentecost 10



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**“He breathed on them...”** John 20.22

The beautiful breathy swirls we see in Jan Richardson’s painting accompany her “Blessing of Breathing” written out of her own experience of grief and fear, those close companions. Within months of their marriage, she was severed by his sudden death from the husband with whom a wonderful new life was just beginning. She knows how grief squeezes the breath out of you, leaving a hard knot of panic where your heart should be.

Holed up in Jerusalem, the disciples are similarly severed. The death of the one who had made life real for them, on whom they’d pinned their hopes and dreams, had left them reeling, knocked the life out of them.

And into their grief and fear, Jesus comes. And, echoing the divine breathing into the nostrils of newly created humanity (Gen 2.7), he breathes into his disciples. He softens the stony knot of their panic. He re-animates them with the breath of his risen life.

**What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?**

The breath painted by Jan Richardson is vigorous, full of movement. Against a dark background streaked only by nauseous yellow (bottom left), the blue-white whorls are fresh, minty, clean. This is the new holy air for which our 21st century world longs. For which we each long.

In John’s gospel, the breath of the Spirit comes ‘on the first day of the week’: Luke tells us the rushing wind arrives at Pentecost, when the first-fruits of grain and grape were harvested. The old week is over, the winter past – both settings underline the grace-filled newness with which the Spirit sweeps in. The gift of newness is ours too. Christ is breathing still. He is breathing into the dashed hopes, the deadening grief and fear brought by pandemic. He is filling the lungs of this weary world with his life. Like those first disciples, it will again be possible for *us* to breathe easily, interact freely, look to the future with hope.

**“The Holy Spirit is that power  
which opens eyes that are closed,  
hearts that are unaware and minds  
that shrink from too much reality.”**

John V Taylor

## Prayer

**Breathe, O Christ,  
into our grief and fear  
and fill us with  
fresh purpose,  
fresh hope. Amen**