

**Breath, Connection, and Growth among
the Chaos and Emotions of Life
Sermon by Allie Jensen**

Good morning!

First off, thank you for having me preach on this beautiful Sunday morning in April, thank you for your support of Lutheran Campus Ministry, and I thank God for the opportunity to preach here in this beautiful and Holy place. I am Allie Jensen, a senior studying Spanish at the University of Minnesota with the intention of studying a health care profession in the future. Health starts with breath and connection. Let me say that again. Breath and connection. Both of these are integral in and throughout the Bible.

Take the Gospel for example, “He [Jesus] breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”. The word breath and derivatives of it is found many times in and throughout the Bible. The word for breath in Greek is *pneuma* meaning breath, wind or spirit. *Pneuma* is found in many medical terms used today such as *pneumatic*, *pneumonia*, among others. A component of the medical field vital to its success is the engagement of healthcare professionals and their patients and the connection that is formed between them.

Connection with people is also an integral part in the growth and understanding of the relationship with God and the Scripture. In the Gospel reading, “Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’”. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.” Jesus is actively focused on the disciples in this passage and then later on Thomas. The writer of the Gospel of John uses vivid imagery to describe the scene. Could you imagine the chaos and panic that ensued when all of a sudden Jesus entered the room? The disciples are all locked in and full of fear and uncertainty and then Jesus arrives. Jesus immediately goes to the souls first and makes the hearts of the disciples at peace first, and then goes on showing them his wounds. Soul and then the body. This seems all too relatable for me, and probably for all of us in some way or another. God meets me where I am at many times and calms my soul before pursuing me further into God’s overpowering love. What is soul? I don’t think many people actually know what it is but for me, I believe the soul to be the place that God can really enter in and get to know us and where we really invest and feel the Lord’s presence. Soul and then the body. That is where genuine connection is strengthened.

Lutheran Campus Ministry is a place where I definitely feel a connection with God. Mountain Vespers and Holden evening prayer worship services are both featured at Pause, our Wednesday night student worship, a time where we are reminded to take a step back and reflect on the week and take a Pause in the daily business of our lives as college students. Last winter, January of 2017, the Leadership team of Lutheran Campus Ministry went to the ARC (Action Reflection Celebration) Intentional Community in Stanchfield, MN for our Winter Leadership Retreat. This place is a community that provides serenity and wholeness for those who want to nourish their minds, bodies, and souls. It serves groups of people as well as

individuals who are seeking rest and spiritual rebirth and embraces the ideal of the spiritual nature of life. I remember feeling at peace and really present in God's creation at ARC, especially when I was with the other LCM leaders. The community of people I have found at LCM are focused on relationship with each other, curiosity of the mind, hospitality and service with one another and the campus community and growth into Scripture. The support of Lutheran Campus Ministry has been an important part of my growth into sharing my faith in a larger community. Even when I am not always present at every LCM event or service, or no longer a leader of campus community due to time, I never feel any less a part of the community.

This situation was similar for Thomas too. But where was he? What could he have been doing for eight days? Too for the Gospel text states, "Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came" So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord' Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe". Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them.". Again, it makes me think and ponder. where was he? Was he around? The disciples did not exclude Thomas later on; he remained among them and was allowed to see Jesus later.

Thomas did not feel out of place when he came back. The community was still there for him, just like the LCM community is there for me and God is there for me.

God remains active through this entire passage and in the 1 John passage also; the message of active connection and tangibility of the Lord is rich through words such as; Breathed, Seen, Place, Send, in the Gospel of John as well as the 1 John passage which says, 'That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.'" God is active in our lives, even if we don't always recognize it.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Part of his prayer at the kitchen table speaks to the idea of God coming to us in ways we don't expect and allowing us to really grow into God's word for us and go back to Him, even at our most weakest, darkest points and our points of giving up. I will read a brief part of his prayer, "At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I have never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: 'Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.'" Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.'" When Martin Luther King Jr. thought he could not go on, God came to him. God's presence put MLK Jr at peace at a time at he almost could not go on. That happens to us too where God calms our soul first and shows up in ways we don't expect.

When I am faced with challenges through life, God shows up in ways I least expect it; through friends, new people, new experiences and through His Word. God always draws me back to the Word especially through my favorite Psalm, Psalm 23. "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not

want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.” That line; think about it. He restores my soul. That is what Jesus does in the Gospel; goes to the soul first and then the body. Just like the Shepherd leaves the herd to look for the lone lost sheep in the parable that Jesus tells earlier in chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, the Shepherd goes and finds us, lost sheep, and brings us back into community with others and Him. It is a beautiful example of the importance of company and fellowship when growing into relationship with the Lord. The community of Thomas surrounds him when Jesus comes back the second time and then the disciples later spread the Good News.

How can I and the Lutheran Campus community be God’s breath, hands and feet on this college campus as students? How can we be God’s breath, hands and feet in Dinkytown and the greater community? For I say these things to spread the Good News just like the end of Chapter 20 of John states, “So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name”. The enrichment of God’s love as it is strengthened in community in this Gospel reading among the disciples is exactly what we are called to do as members of the Church. We are called to spread the Peace and the Love and Good News starting with reaching out to God ourselves and accepting the enriching active powerful actions of the risen Jesus Christ as we continue to grow into God’s word and then sharing it with our community.

This is something that we can do with God’s help too, starting with the breath and the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives us, just like Jesus calmed the disciples’ souls first and then engaged them with his wounds and spoke to them with the tangibility of his body and his hands and then later the same with Thomas and his actions towards Thomas.

And that, is the Good News; Jesus actively seeks us out by pursuing us in community and wants us to do the same. How glorious are his words; Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I have sent you. Alleluia Amen