

“Breathing Out Resurrection”

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A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Easter

John 20.19-23

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It was still the first day of the week. That evening, while the disciples were behind closed doors because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. When the disciples saw the Lord, they were filled with joy. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you don’t forgive them, they aren’t forgiven.”

John 20.19-23
Common English Bible)

This morning, I’m simply going to tell two stories, and we’ll watch a third. I think they show why resurrection matters: why Jesus’ resurrection matters, and why the promise of our resurrection matters.

When Jesus met his followers in the locked room that first night of Easter, he breathed into them. Remember, in the Bible’s story of the very beginning of everything, God breathed into soil and made us alive. Now Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples, and they start breathing out resurrection. The Holy Spirit keeps breathing life into places of death, through people like us, who are following Jesus. Like in these stories.

I

You might remember the chilling scene. Men in orange jumpsuits are being forced along a Libyan beach by ISIS terrorists. In moments they will be murdered.

Twenty are Egyptians; one is from Ghana. They are poor labourers in Libya for work. They are Christians of the Coptic Church. Its roots go back to the earliest generations of the Jesus-movement. ISIS picked them because they follow Jesus.

So many people—Christians, and also Muslims—have been horrified and heartened by these men. They are martyrs. “Martyr” means “witness.” Christian martyr-witnesses never kill. They are willing to die because they follow Jesus. These men could have renounced their faith. Instead, with their last voice, they called out Jesus’ name.

A brother of two of them, Beshir, later phoned a television talk show.¹ Listen to some of what he said:

¹ The clip with subtitles can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-yCmnyzYeW8>

[My brothers] are a pride to Christianity. And they are my pride too. They make me walk raising my head up in pride.

ISIS gave us more than we asked when they didn't edit out the part where they declared their faith and called Jesus Christ. ISIS helped us strengthen our faith. Yes believe me! I thank ISIS because they didn't cut the audio when they screamed declaring their faith.

Then, he said:

Today I was having a chat with my mother, asking what she would do if she saw one of the ISIS members on the street. . . . and I told [her] "That's the man who slayed your sons." She said, "I will ask for God to open his eyes and ask him into our house because he helped us enter the kingdom of God!"

Finally, Beshir prayed:

Dear God please open their eyes to be saved and to quit their ignorance and the wrong teachings they were taught.

ISIS killed them. Yet these martyrs know that someday they will be breathing out resurrection. Because Jesus, whom they follow, is alive!

II

The second story happens in Calgary.² Kadin Osborne is 23, a plumber, and his mother tried to talk him out of buying a house. He did it anyway. Now, he lives there with four or five other young men, including another plumber who just moved to town, a former U. S. Marine who was living at the Salvation Army, and an ex-convict. What they have in common is they met through their church, needed a home, and now live in this house.

This house matters. A year ago this Wednesday, five university students were stabbed and murdered in this house.

After, some wanted it bulldozed. But Kadin bought the house. He got a great deal; there was no bidding war, because it is a death-house.

Kadin bought it because Jesus defeated death. So death should not be allowed dominion over any place. Even a death house can be taken back and turned into a place of life.

"I think we've done that to an extent, just having a presence of life there," Kadin says. "There's laughter back in the house, and life, and love."

People wonder if it's creepy. Kadin answers: *"I know it seems crazy when someone . .*

² See <http://digital.faithtoday.ca/faithtoday/20150304#pg48> and www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/11/25/calgary-stabbing-house-buyer_n_6221990.html

.says, 'I'm not afraid because Jesus conquered death 2,000 years ago. But we're just regular Christian guys who want to make a difference in the world, and the neighbours have been awesome in giving us the opportunity to do that.'

One guy from the neighbourhood, a gang member who sold drugs to kids, ended up at their kitchen table, bawling his eyes out. Through his friendship with these men, in this once-death-house, now alive, he left his life of death behind. His mom says these men helped redeem her son, and are redeeming the neighbourhood.

Death seized this house. But now, it is breathing out resurrection. Because Kadin and his friends are following Jesus, who is alive!

III

The third story takes us to northern Iraq. We are in a refugee camp, in Erbil, near the front lines. The people here are Christians who fled their homes as ISIS chased them. Let's hear from Myriam.³

You can watch the video clip here.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzLXM_zo2e8

IV

We might never have to forgive the likes of ISIS. Notice, though, that's not where Myriam started forgiving. It was her and Sandra, playing together, and wronging each other, and learning to forgive one another. They were learning to breathe resurrection. They were already following Jesus. With whom do you need to breathe forgiveness today?

I really hope you do not become a martyr. Still, there are ways you can bear witness. Remember, that's what "martyr" means, "witness." You can bear witness in your life to Jesus' victory over death. Maybe by how you face suffering and hardship, even death. How do we learn that? By following Jesus, who is breathing out resurrection.

You might not get an opportunity to buy a house that has been a crime scene. Still, there are places, situations, neighbourhoods, communities, organizations, friendships, that smell of death. You can breathe resurrection into those places. Because Jesus is alive! And through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is breathing resurrection into you.

³ The interview was done by SAT7-Kids, a Christian television network which broadcast across the Arab Middle East. About 9 million children watch it regularly. See <http://www.sat7.org/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAT-7#SAT-7_KIDS