

Morning breath

By [Craig Kocher](#)

March 23, 2008

The first thing the resurrected Jesus does in the presence of his disciples in the Upper Room is breathe. Before his famous back and forth with Thomas, before he offers his bloody hands and side, Jesus breathes, offers his peace, and then he breathes peace on the disciples.

At Duke Chapel we exchange the peace of Christ each Sunday.

It is done in the southern way of firm handshakes, solid eye contact, warm greetings, all tidy and polite. Jesus does not abide social graces. Jesus passes peace with his breath. Forget handshakes and sunny “good mornings.” Jesus comes close. He invades personal space, gets in the face of his disciples, and breathes the breath of peace through his wounded body.

Peace and wounds dine together during the Easter season. Jesus is raised from the dead, and as the rising of Jesus’ light falls on the brokenness of the world, Thomas recognizes the resurrection in the wounds of the cross. In Thomas we see the hope and possibility of the empty tomb, a sign of John’s New Jerusalem, and the suffering and death that continue to plague the earth. In Thomas we see the grittiness of Easter.

Easter is always at risk of being domesticated and sentimentalized, a forever-after ending to a Disney animation. We’re eager to replace the scars of nails and spear with butterflies and rainbows; to ambush gospel hope and the resurrection of the body with spiritual ideals and heavenly metaphors. But Easter is not the end of the fairy tale, a once-a-year cherry atop a tasty good life. Easter begins the church’s real work.

Jesus breathes the Spirit of peace on his fearful disciples and commissions them for ministry in the Easter church. Neighbor love and peace-making do not happen at a distance, he insists; they happen by sharing personal space, getting close to the

wounds of the world, and exchanging breath.

Blessed are those who get close enough to breathe on one another.