

Ready for some numbers?

There are 138,162 Greek words that construct the entire New Testament.
(The entire Testament was originally written in Greek)

Many of those words repeat;
so much so that there are 5,437 individual Greek words that make up the Testament.

313 of those words are repeated more than 50 times
(which accounts for 110k of the total 138k).

Why am I bringing this up? Because I want to tell you about a word that is used only once. It is phonetically represented in transliterated English as *m-poo-saw-o*. It is loosely translated as “breathed”. Here it is in a sentence: Jesus breathed on them. (John 20:22) In context, here is the entire passage:

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the authorities, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he **breathed** on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”*

John 20:19-23

He breathed on them.

They received the Holy Spirit.

Forgiveness of sins can be forgiven or retained.

It started with the “breathed”. For such an important event as this, I am frankly surprised this is the only time in the New Testament that *breathed* has been used. Now, for those who know the Bible, you might find a problem with that. After all, the four Gospels say that Jesus “breathed” his last and then died on the cross. In the Acts of the Apostles, Saul was “breathing” threats on the newly formed Church. So, how can I say that the above passage in John is the only time the word was used?

Let’s take a look at the word – *m-poo-saw-o*. “Em” would be the representation of the first part of the word which means, in English, like the “en” of “enter” or “encounter”. Imagine the “em” as the opening of a door and stepping in. The second part has to do with breath. Why is it different than the others? Those other Greek words start with “ex” as in “exit” or “exhale”. This makes it one of the hardest words I have encountered to translate into English.

It is not “*exhale*” but it is also not “*inhale*”. It’s like a breath that just entered a room. Not only do we not have a word for it we really don’t even have a frame of reference for it. In order to attempt to do so, however, let’s take a look at nature.

Forests breathe. Trees take in carbon dioxide and *m-poo-saw-o* oxygen. Forests are like the lungs of the earth. If you have spent any time in a forest, you’ll have the sense of stepping into (“em”) and breathing in fresh air. That’s the closest concept I can imagine for what Jesus did in that room with the disciples.

Here’s another way to look at it. If you have a belly button, you were connected to your mother with the umbilical cord. This allowed your mother to breathe for you. In other words, your mother *m-poo-saw-o* you. When you, all of us, were born, the cord was cut. In a few moments after that you (we) drew your first breath with your brand new, never used before, lungs. Suddenly you could breathe on your own.

I think of it this way: prior to the crucifixion, Jesus was breathing for his disciples. The cross was the cutting of the umbilical cord (metaphorically speaking). The first Sunday of the resurrection, Jesus *m-poo-saw-o* and then the disciples could breathe on their own. Once they were breathing on their own, Jesus said (in words like) this: If you choose to forgive others they will be forgiven. But, the choice is yours to also not forgive. We have that choice with us today too.

Let’s look at what the disciples-turned-apostles did with their new breath. In the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is again arrested with the rest of his group for talking about Jesus. When he was confronted by the religious authorities, Peter offered forgiveness – we are all forgiven. He could have retained their sins and told them God is going to deal harshly with them for all that they have done; but no, Peter knows the loving and forgiving God and has, with the Breath of Life on him, offered them forgiveness.

One last thing about *m-poo-saw-o*: it is a verb that has a Greek tense not found in English. The tense means that once that event has taken place, life has not nor will not be the same. Just like in childbirth, everyone’s life has been changed from that moment on. One Jesus shared his breath with them, they were forever changed. That breath changed them and it is still changing us today.

We are called to forgive; but, Jesus knows, it’s our choice to retain as well. God is not going to force us to forgive. But, the breath of God, the peace which passes all understanding, is with us today. I say that we follow in Peter’s example and lead with forgiveness with the breath that comes from God.