

***“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’.”***  
(St. John 20.19)

This week, we continue to bask in the joy of the Resurrection. Today, being the Octave Day of Easter, culminates our week of celebration, but is still only the beginning of the long Easter season. But, I can acknowledge that just because the joy of Easter is upon us, we don't all *feel* necessarily joyful. This, of course, can happen for many reasons: there are many stressors and distractors in our lives. Perhaps this time of year is the anniversary of a death, or we recall family traditions long gone, or we continue to be burdened by heavy things in our lives. The juxtaposition of joy and sorrow, of happiness and despair, are a large part of our Christian journey. We acknowledge that though we can come together in worship, that the person sitting next to us might be experiencing life quite differently than we are right now.

This Sunday, sometimes called “Low Sunday”, captures some of this mood. It is called “Low” for a few reasons: compared to the solemn high services of Easter Sunday, this Sunday is usually simpler; and compared to the high attendance of Easter Sunday, this Sunday is usually sparser. And it's not to be pessimistic, but to recognize the reality that with a high usually comes a corresponding low. This is as true for events in our lives, and the life of the church, as it is for our faith, too.

The Gospel which we read today is Jesus appearing to his disciples in the upper room. The disciples were assembled there in fear: fear for what might happen next to them after Jesus had been killed. This was the evening of that first Easter, where only a few short hours ago, Mary Magdalene claimed to have seen the risen Lord. They knew that Jesus' body had been missing, and they heard what Mary said, but they did not yet fully understand – that is until they saw Jesus in their midst. And he came to them bearing a message of peace and reassurance. The disciples were glad to have seen their Lord and received the promise of the Holy Spirit and the authority to remit or retain sins. The fear in which the disciples gathered together gave way to the peace, comfort, and gift of Jesus' presence. The distress which they felt was absorbed by the Lord in the flesh, showing them the marks in his hands and his side which proved the Resurrection to be true. It was here, in this moment, that things began to make sense even while probably simultaneously making the *least* sense. The man who was dead, whom they watched die, was alive and standing before them.

With Jesus' appearance before the disciples, the power of God was on full display. With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that our Old Testament Lesson was an earlier example of the power of God, but to a much smaller audience: an audience of one. In our Old Testament lesson today, we read about the Valley of the Dry Bones. That place where the prophet Ezekiel was taken was covered in very old, very *dead* bones. Whoever they belonged to died a considerably long time ago. But God asked Ezekiel, “can these bones live?”, to which Ezekiel replies, “O Lord God, *you* know” (Ezek. 3:3-4). To Ezekiel's bewilderment, these very old, very dry, very *dead* bones responded to the prophecy from the Lord. Just as the Lord had said, the bones came together, and they formed bodies – though still lifeless. God said to Ezekiel, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live” (v. 9), and it was so. And the breath formed “an exceedingly great army”.

The Lord then tells Ezekiel, “You shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord” (vv. 13-14). The Lord God, the creator of the universe, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Israel, not only created the world, but has the created world at his command.

He can raise up those long dead at a word. He can bring together the scattered dry bones with his breath and breathe life into them once more. Those who were dead are raised.

How amazed Ezekiel must have been, and how amazed Jesus' disciples must have been. For the Lord created new life where there was death, hope where there was despair, breath where there was dust. The human understanding of the world was in an instant replaced with a powerful display of Godly control. And this power – this incredible act – was recognizable by the holes in Jesus' hands and side. As the Epistle tells us, "The testimony of God is greater" than the testimony of man (1 John 5.9). God is above all, in all, and with all. He is omnipotent, all-present, everywhere. And his testimony, his raising the dead to life, is proof that he has command of the entire order of creation.

But I ask, what does this have to do with the idea of "Low Sunday"? As I said before, many of us are sitting here in different places in our lives. Some of us may be energized by this powerful display of God; energized by the joyfulness of Easter; our faith deeper by the remembrance of this testimony from God. But some of us may be far from there. Some of us may be worried about illness, some of us may be grieving a loss that has happened or a loss we're anticipating. Some of us might be so burnt out that we've fallen off the metaphorical wagon. And some of us might be fatigued by doing the mental gymnastics we sometimes need to do to reconcile our faith with the world we actually see around us.

I know because I've been there. Seven or eight years ago, I was in that boat. The busyness of Holy Week gave way to the joy of Easter, but it felt like the world had forgotten. It felt like nobody cared. And so, I wondered why it was important. I wondered why we care. I wondered if it had happened. And the next Sunday, dutifully going to church, the gospel went a bit longer than ours did this morning, and it told the story of the Apostle Thomas. Thomas who, according to St. John, missed out on Jesus' appearance in the room and did not believe that his colleagues had seen the risen Lord. But the Lord reappeared and told Thomas to touch the wounds so that he might know, and he said "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20.29). Thomas was able to see and touch the Risen Jesus on behalf of all of us who have never seen or touched him. He has earned the unfortunate epithet of "Doubting Thomas" from his hesitation, but realistically he lived on to be "Believing Thomas". This story felt like it reached out and extended a hand to me, to allow me to realize "it's okay, for even the people who *knew* Jesus had their doubts, and yet the Lord cared for them and invited them back in".

It's precisely this message that rings out for us as we sit here, basking in the Paschal Glory. It's OK not to be OK. It's OK to be upset, it's OK to be sad, it's OK to feel like you're not doing enough. Because our Lord will meet you there and walk with you. Our Lord's passion is this beautiful example of his love for us, that he was willing to subject himself to the worst of the human condition so that he could turn it around and sanctify it: make it holy. And right in that place where we think we've lost our hope, or that God has abandoned us, or that we think there's no recovery, is where he finds us. And in time, through his all-powerful hand and life-giving breath, brings us back.

While it's unfortunate that it has been especially relegated to funerals, the hymn "In the Garden" shares that message with us: *"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."*

So, wherever we may find ourselves today and every day, the Resurrection, the joy of Easter, is a powerful and ever-significant message of hope. For the breath which God breathes into his creation knows no bounds or limitations, and far surpasses our understanding (and certainly our control). No matter where we find ourselves today, on this Octave Day of Easter, may we be filled with this hope and hear the words our Lord spoke to the disciples and to Thomas in the upper room when he said to them "Peace be with you." And may we all be so blessed to experience God's peace in our lives.