

SSERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER¹
The First Sunday after Easter²
(“Low Sunday”)

Lessons:

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the fourteenth Verse of the third Chapter of Zephaniah.³

“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith [SETH] the LORD.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth Verse of the twentieth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁴

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed [SHOWD] unto them his hands and his side.

Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith [SETH] unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus [DIDD-ih-muhs], was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith [SETH] he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith [SETH] unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*”⁵ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear Lord, let us without fear take up our cross to follow You and to do the work You have left for us. Let us be about those tasks assigned us without shirking them, and without fear, trusting always in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost to accomplish all that has been given us to accomplish. This we ask for the Glory of Your Holy Name. Amen.

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The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹
April 7, 2013

¹ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday after Easter, 2013.

³ Zephaniah 3:14-end (KJV).

⁴ St. John 20:19-end (KJV).

⁵ St. John 20:21 (KJV).

⁶ St. Matthew 18:20 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 20:21 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 20:20 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 20:21 (KJV).

¹⁰ St. John 20:22 (KJV).

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Homily:

Now is no time for rest.

Jesus at His resurrection defeated sin. He accomplished the greatest victory that ever could be, yet after His death, His disciples were afraid and went into hiding for fear of the Jews.

Even though the victory over death and sin was won, the disciples were terrified. They were shaken to their core, and while Mary Magdalene [*magg-duh-LEE-knee*], Simon Peter and John had seen Jesus resurrected, the rest had not. Jesus therefore undertook to re-assure them that He yet lived and that His Church must now go on.

At this point in the Church’s development, they could not stop their work and mission to go into hiding. Jesus could have sent them a messenger--that, after all, is what both words “angel“ and “apostle” actually mean, a “messenger”--but instead He chose to appear to them Himself, to attest personally to His resurrection, and to give them their commission to go out and convert the whole world.

Those Apostles would be called on to testify to the whole world as to what they had seen and known of Jesus, and to build a Church on that testimony. It made sense, then, that they should be able to testify of having seen Jesus first-hand after the Resurrection.

So it came to pass that a group of the disciples were meeting a week after the Resurrection. They were afraid, but it is certain that their conversation and their thoughts centered on what had happened to Jesus, and what, in consequence, would become of them. What will we do now, they must have wondered. How do we continue Jesus’ work when He is no longer here among us?

Suddenly, Jesus appeared in the midst of them.

Again on the first day of the week, one week after He rose from death, He came to the disciples. Despite the doors' being locked, He came into the midst of them. In doing so, He gave His proof to His promise, "*For where two or three come together in my name, there I will be with them.*"⁶

To put their minds at ease, he then greeted them, "*Peace be unto you.*"⁷ Despite what had been done to Him, in loving reaction to their fears, the Lord gave them His blessing of peace. We use the same greeting to each other in the Mass each week: "The Peace of the Lord be alway with thee."

Despite all the world can do, and in spite of whatever travails we may face, we yet greet each other with this blessing from our Lord. Nor should we ever forsake our meeting together, our worship and our meeting together, just as these early Christians continued to meet together despite their quite real fear that they would be persecuted by the Jews.

From this greeting we draw courage, faith and joy, knowing that Jesus stands beside us still.

At the time, it was being said in Jerusalem among the Jews that the disciples had somehow overpowered the guard posted at the tomb, that they then had moved aside the stone, and finally that they had stolen Jesus' body away. Yet, there Jesus was, alive, and speaking to the disciples in person.

The reaction of the disciples was as we might expect. Confusion, doubt, and excited joy began to take over their hearts. As even more proof of just who He is, Jesus showed the gathered disciples the still-open wounds on His hands and side from the nails and the spear. The disciples then were "*filled with joy at seeing the Lord.*"⁸

This Sunday in the Church year is often called "Low Sunday", because after the excitement of Easter, and no doubt as well the fatigue of feeding and entertaining family, of travel-

ling and of visiting, people are tired, and want to take a brief respite.

There is, however, no time for respite now. Our Lord has given us our "marching orders," and there is work to be done. There is a whole world to convert to the faith and to bring to Jesus. His people are everywhere, needing our care, our teaching, our ministry.

"*As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*"⁹ The Father sent the Son to live as one of us, to make possible our salvation. Now, in turn, Jesus sends us forward to spread His message to the world, and to care for His sheep everywhere.

To the early disciples, the commission was somewhat different. Theirs was the task of planting the Church and growing it. They accomplished this task by spreading the message of the Holy Gospel in person, first among the Jews, then to the wider world of the Gentiles.

To convey unto the Apostles, and through them to the rest of the disciples, the power and authority to accomplish the great task He assigned them, and us, Jesus, "*breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*"¹⁰

With this great commission, that they go forth to spread the Gospel, and with His grant of the power and authority to do that work, Jesus firmly established His Church, and gave it a mission. The Church remains, and so does the mission. We are still called upon to go forward and make disciples, led always by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So with renewed strength, vigor and joy in the Resurrection of our Lord, and in His great mission for us, let us resolve to continue without failing to do His work here on earth each and every day until the Word has been brought to every person in every corner of the world.

Let us pray.