

April 19, 2020 | The Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19-31

OLD SOUTH CHURCH IN BOSTON

Resurrection Peace

At what point this week did Easter fade? At what point did the Alleluias you belted from your home last Sunday go mute?

At what point did you lose that sense of Easter hope?

For the disciples, it didn't long at all at all. On that first Easter evening, despite being told by Mary that she had seen the Risen Christ, they were fixed in their grief and fear. Their brother Jesus was crucified, dead, buried. So trapped by their dismay and agony the disciples couldn't bring themselves to believe Mary's account. They locked the doors, racked with sorrow and fear.

In some way or another, we all know that feeling. Walter Bruggemann calls this a place of disorientation¹, disorder, despair, disbelief. We find ourselves in this place, referred to in the Psalms as "the Pit", when we feel up against the wall, when it seems like we have lost control over our own lives, when we feel trapped.²

We end up in the pit when the doctor gives us the bad news or we lose our job or even because of something like a hurtful word or when feedback feels more like criticism.

And for many of us, we find ourselves in this pit, this place of disorientation because of the state of our world now.

The disciples were deep in that Pit of despair, absolutely bound by their grief and pain, locked away until Jesus appeared, risen, and alive. And they moved from disorientation to hope, from anguish to alleluia.

But the disciple Thomas wasn't there, he wasn't with the others. Perhaps he was so deep in his own despair, his disbelief that he had gone off to be by himself, alone. When he returns, the disciples proclaim what they had seen: the Risen One.

¹ Bruggemann, Walter, *Praying the Psalms*, p. 18

² Indebted to the Rev. Shannon Kershner who first made this connection in her Eastertide sermon in 2019

But what was Thomas suppose to say? No matter how convincing their testimony, he couldn't believe them. Perhaps wasn't in doubt of God's power or might, but just too deep in his grief and disorientation to believe.

Thomas remained in that pit of desolation and disbelief for another week according to the scripture. A full week while the others rejoiced, Thomas spiraled deeper and deeper into disorientation and despair.

Tradition calls this Sunday, *Low Sunday*. It stands in total contrast to the height of Easter Day just one week ago. Despite the glory and promise of Easter, we wake on Monday to our human realities, the week goes on and we begin to slide back into the pit until we find ourselves a week later, there, low with Thomas in what feels like a never ending Good Friday world.

It feels like we are all in this worldwide, disciple-like state of disbelief and disorientation pit, in which Easter Sunday feels like some distant fantasy, unattainable. Like the disciples, locked in our homes, afraid, unsure, dislocated, and low.

And yet, when Jesus appeared to to the gathered disciples and then to Thomas, both times, the first thing he said, "Peace be with you."

He didn't berate them for dwelling in their despair.
Jesus didn't scold them for not believing.
He simply greeted them with peace.

Jesus met the disciples, met Thomas, in the pit, in their grief and isolation. He gently showed his scars and wounds, and offered peace with hands and body marred by anguish and death. Jesus took on their grief and with the same breath, as sweet as Easter lilies, exchanged their despair for peace.

And that resurrection peace, supplies courage and hope. It applies at every point where we fear that God's goodwill for the world's well-being is an out of reach fantasy, out of touch with the chaos of our now everyday life. Hope that God stands with us. Courage to face it. For the one who offers the words of peace is the very one who has endured the brunt of this worlds chaos, dislocation and despair, yet now stands in the disciples midst, in our midst—risen, indeed!³

³ D. Cameron Murchison, Feasting on the word, Year A, Volume 2

Resurrection peace that gives me courage and lifts me just enough to begin to see beyond the pit of my despair to a world shinning with bright Easter array.

So yes, we are in the pit—when most days feel disordered and dislocated—but hear this: Jesus comes to greet us in the pit, bearing the marks of human grief and struggle, lifting us, granting us that peace that surpasses all understanding: courage, hope, resurrection—and the enteral promise that this place, the pit, is not forever.

Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed. Alleluia.