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Year A, 2 Easter – 4-23-17
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Well, here we are, on the other side of Easter. We stuck together through the forty days of Lent. We journeyed from Palm Sunday to the solemn celebration of the last supper on Maundy Thursday. We went to the darkness of Good Friday, as we remembered the crucifixion of our savior. And then, last Sunday, we came together to celebrate the wonder of the empty tomb. We had joyful worship, magnificent music, glorious flowers, and festive activities. The Rector preached a fantastic sermon about believing the impossible. He reminded us that we are called to live as people of the resurrection and to give witness to that in our world. As we embark on this Easter season, we rejoice in the knowledge that death does not have the final word; God does. This is our new reality.

I have been reflecting on this journey that we have walked together. As a church, we make the transition from the darkness of Good Friday to the joy of Easter morning in three days. But several things this week reminded me that our reality as people of the resurrection is not always reflected in our experience. On Monday, I spoke with a friend and wished him a Happy Easter. He explained that it hadn't been so happy. His son, a bright young college student, had been found over the weekend in a tree with a noose. Thank God, someone helped him, and he is now receiving the care he needs. But for that young man and his family, it still feels like Good Friday. On Thursday, I was called to visit a man in the hospital who accidentally was shot in the head when his girlfriend was putting a rifle away. For both, it still feels like Good Friday. Many of us may not be dealing with such dramatic incidents but are, nevertheless, facing loss and grief and troubles of our own. And the news from our nation and our world this week doesn't exactly reflect our resurrected reality. As author Barbara Johnson says, "We are Easter people living in a Good Friday world."

Today's gospel begins with the disciples stuck in their own Good Friday world. They have heard about the empty tomb, but they are locked in a house in fear. It is then that Jesus comes among them and says, "Peace be with you." Poor Thomas, of course, wasn't there, and when his friends share the news of the resurrected Christ, he proclaims defiantly, "*Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.*" So Jesus comes again, this time when Thomas is there, and gives Thomas the proof that he needs. "*My Lord and my God!*" Thomas exclaims.

This gospel reveals the deeply profound good news of Easter – the fact that our reality as people of the resurrection is not based on our experience. The resurrected Christ met the disciples in their fear. He met Thomas in his doubts. And he meets us wherever we are, whether it is joyfully proclaiming the resurrection in our Easter finery or back in the darkness of Good

Friday or anywhere in between. Our transition from the cross to the grave to the resurrection may not happen in three days like it does in the church. Each of those experiences may feel more like seasons in our lives. We may even go back and forth, needing to be reminded again and again that death does not have the last word, that the tomb is empty, and that love will win in the end.

Just like those scared disciples, Jesus comes to us wherever we are and offers his peace. That peace isn't the promise of a perfect world, at least not today. Rather, it is the promise that in spite of all of the hurt and harm the world inflicts – in spite of whatever dark Good Friday's we are living through – God's love and compassion are always with us through the presence of his resurrected Son.

I read an essay recently by an author who wrote honestly about her experience of being in a Good Friday season after a number of both personal and professional traumas this year. She says:

I believe in the resurrection, so I know it will come. It always does. God wrangles victory out of actual, physical death. The cross taught us that. You can't have anything more dead than a three-day old dead body, and yet we serve a risen Savior. New life is always possible evidently, well past the moment it makes sense to still hope for it. The empty tomb taught us that. I have enough faith to live a Friday and Saturday existence right now without fear that Easter Sunday won't come.

So as we continue in this Easter season, may we rest in the knowledge that the resurrected Jesus meets us wherever we are – in our fear like the disciples, in our doubt like Thomas, in our grief, or in our joy. And may we live with the hope and promise that empty tomb brings – no matter what. Amen.