

Welcome to Low Sunday. That's the name given to this day in some liturgical traditions-Low Sunday. It wasn't like this last week. Everybody goes to church on Easter. The show is good. The sanctuary is full. The music is glorious, the flowers are gorgeous.

The Sunday after Easter is usually the week of lowest church attendance. Can you think of anything more depressing? Who would want to come to church on Low Sunday?

Now, interestingly enough, there's another Christian tradition that claims the second Sunday of Easter as Bright Sunday. On Bright Sunday people played practical jokes on each other, drenched each other with water, sang and danced. Early theologians referred to Jesus' resurrection as The Easter Laugh-God's supreme joke played on that old imposter death.

As one pastor put it, "Easter is the season when the Lord laughs our loud, laughs at all the things that snuff out our joy, all the things that pretend to be all-powerful, like cruelty and madness and despair and evil, and most especially, the great pretender, death. Jesus sweeps them all away with his wonderful resurrection laughter." In the early centuries of Christianity, Easter celebrations went on for weeks. Today's Christian calendar celebrates Eastertide for 50 days until the Day of Pentecost.

So, is it a Low Sunday or a Bright Sunday for you? Have you come carrying heavy burdens or have you come ready to celebrate the victory of Christ once more?

Jokes—I heard a story about a priest, a minister and a rabbi. They wanted to see who was best at their job. So each one goes into the woods, finds a bear, and attempts to convert it. Later, they all get together. The priest begins, “When I found the bear, I read to him from the catechism and sprinkled him with holy water. Next week is his first Communion.”

“I found a bear by the stream,” says the minister, “and preached God’s holy Word. The bear was so mesmerized that he let me baptize him.” They both looked down at the rabbi, who was lying on a gurney in a body cast. “Looking back,” the rabbi said, “maybe I shouldn’t have started with the circumcision.”

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christian faith. Without the resurrection, the Apostle Paul says his preaching and our faith are in vain. We are still marveling at the miracle of resurrection life. I believe it is a Bright Sunday and one in which we can find joy in the unfailing care of God for us, God’s people.

Psalm 16 is a psalm of confidence and gratitude. We hear a personal confession from the psalmist who finds joy in his encounter with God—“I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, *I will not be shaken*. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure,

because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay...you will fill me with joy in your presence.” The word “trust” is not in this psalm but it is spoken in the language of relationship.

In a psalm of confidence we often find a list of all the things that can go wrong in the world and the things in which we are helpless to defeat. As we discover all the darkness around the psalmist it is then that the light of God shines forth. The Psalm provides us the reality of suffering, even the distress it causes, but also the ever-present help of the Lord. Psalm 16 gives voice to the experience of being held in God’s hand, secure in God’s goodness in every circumstance of life driving our need for protection and refuge.

Peter’s speech in Acts 2 quotes the verses I just read from Psalm 16. And Peter asserts Jesus was “crucified and killed” but raised from the dead by the power of God, which becomes the proclamation of the new community of believers--“God raised Jesus, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.”

When did God become more than a name to you? Or, when did Jesus become more than just a name to you? Our faith can be a gradual understanding or a lightning-bolt moment, but somewhere your spirit awakened to the truth that Jesus is more than just a name of someone who lived a couple thousand years ago.

God can't be defined by a name. At some point in our lives, God becomes personal. That's the goal of a Christian; build a relationship with God so that we can go to God with anything in our life, confidently, because "I will not be shaken." But, we hesitate to go to God. We hold back on living life fully and especially with God. At some point we say, "God doesn't listen. God won't do anything."

A small town gathered in the local courthouse for a trial. The prosecuting attorney called his first witness, an elderly woman, to the stand. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know me?" She responded, "Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a young boy. And, frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat, you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a rising big shot, but you haven't the brains to realize you will never amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you."

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, "Mrs. Jones, do you know the defense attorney?" She replied, "Why, of course I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him. And he, too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, and has a drinking problem. The man can't build a normal relationship

with anyone, and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him.”

At this point, the judge rapped the courtroom to silence and called both counselors to the bench. In a very quiet voice, he said with menace, “If either of you asks her if she knows me, I’ll hold you both in contempt of court!”

Many of us go to great lengths to hide the truth about ourselves. We live behind all kinds of masks that conceal who we really are. But, Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross is for you and for me. Why do we hold back from a life fully yielded to Christ? Are we afraid of being shaken?

I know we are afraid Jesus will take our fun away, take the joy out of our life, or heaven forbid, actually make us reconcile with enemies and then make us love ourselves. Listen to the psalmist proclaim his confidence in God, his trust that is unshaken. We can do the same with a personal relationship with the Messiah, with the risen Lord.

In the Acts passage, Peter, who is unshaken even though Jesus has died, is addressing a large crowd of Jews who have come to Jerusalem. This is the Pentecost reading, which is delivered to thousands of Jews who have come from as far away as 1,000 miles. They may never have heard of Jesus of Nazareth and would not have known Jesus’ life, crucifixion, death and resurrection.

To them, Jesus was a name only. But, to Peter and the other disciples, Jesus was more than just a name. It was personal. Jesus was the Messiah, their Lord and Savior. They yielded their life to Christ. We are witnesses to their acts of courage, standing up for their faith. Peter did it. The psalmist does it. Will we do the same?

Peter asserts, “He is the Messiah, the Holy One proclaimed by David and our other prophets. This is the Savior for whom we have been waiting for generations. Every single one of you is a witness to this truth. Whether you saw Jesus with your own eyes or are now hearing the good news for the very first time, you are a witness to what I am telling you today.”

Whether it’s through Peter’s speech or the psalmist’s words, may you take joy in the presence of God – take confident hope in knowing God will not abandon you – take strength in knowing the Lord is always before you, at your right hand – **and you will not be shaken! If God stands by you, you will not waver!**

And it is personal. No longer a name, our God stands by us and that gives us strength when we don’t think we have any left.

It would have been compelling for those first converts to hear Peter’s speech. Today’s believers, both new ones and long-standing ones, struggling with the right words to express one’s faith, it is comforting to hear these words from Ps.

16, “You are my Lord....You have made my lot secure...You show me the path of life...Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

This is how the Christian church begins! With the news of Christ’s death and resurrection, the Jews from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Crete and Rome and other far off places, returned to their homes to share the message of Christ. Let us not be shaken and share this good news with the people we meet this coming week. Amen.