

Low Sunday

Throughout Christendom, this Sunday, today, is known as Low Sunday. I'm not sure if you are aware of that. It's called "Low Sunday" because after the "high" of Easter (meaning the church pews were filled), we hit the lows - church pews are rather empty. Apparently going to church two weeks in a row is a little too much.

I remember my first call out of Seminary was in Rochester, NY, home of Kodak and Xerox. Since I was the new kid on the block, I always preached on Low Sundays. The Sunday after Easter, after Christmas, Memorial Day, Labor Day, 4th of July- you get the picture.

A few years ago a friend of mine who was a little strange (Fargo,ND) had a brainstorm. This was a classmate of mine from seminary who was obsessed with church attendance. He would read books like "Church Growth for Dummies" or "101 Ways To Fill the Pews". He decided that he would call Low Sunday "Everybody Sunday". It would be a worship experience that would meet the expectations of everyone.

So he provided poinsettias and Easter lilies on the altar for those who only come to church on Easter and Christmas. He had electric fans on one side for people who criticized the church for being a hot and stuffy place; and quilts on the other side who thought that the church was cold. Rocking chairs were placed in the aisle for those who thought the pews were too hard. The sermon was only 4 minutes to address the concern that church was too long, and the hymns had only two verses. And the offering? Well, there was none, so that those who thought the church was only interested in money could relax. He claimed that church attendance was up 55%.

Well, I don't think we need to try that approach. Here at Our Savior's, we might have some missing. CEOs and others. CEOs meaning Christmas and Easter only folks. But that's OK. Because I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe many of those folks who attended on Easter will be moved by the spirit to recommit their lives to this parish. I also believe that many visitors, moved by the spirit will ask to be a member here at Our Savior's.

So yes, it is Low Sunday. But the text today is anything but a low message. Let's look at the Sitz im Leben. The setting in life. Always important to do that when we are studying the Biblical Text.

It was Easter evening, and the Bible says that the disciples were gathered in an upstairs room, perhaps the same room where they ate the last supper. The doors were locked because they were afraid. The Roman authorities might have some nails left over. Actually not all the disciples were there. Judas was missing - we know that story. And Thomas, the very faithful one was also missing. Thomas, who said, when learning that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die, "Then let us go there with him and die with him ". Thomas was missing because he chooses to grieve in his own way. Well, while Thomas was gone, Jesus appears to the disciples and they know that there had been a resurrection. They report this to Thomas who didn't buy it. He says, "Unless I see for myself the nail holes in his hands, and until I place my hand in the wound in his side, I will not believe." He needed cold hard evidence, CSI facts, then he will believe. Not so crazy. Many of us are like that when we deal with the scriptures. Give us cold hard facts and then we will believe.

And so the Gospel today is one week later and Thomas is present. "Thomas," Jesus said, "put your finger in this nail hole. Here, reach out your hand and touch the wound in my side. And then believe, Thomas."

But the kicker is the next comment. For Thomas and you and I. Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who do not see, and yet believe." Wow.

Let's do a survey. Raise your hands if you have seen Jesus in bodily form. (*Pastor asks the congregation*). Yup. Nobody. And yet you are still here working on faith. We are here with no CSI stuff and yet we believe. Why? Because we feel his presence. We feel his presence.

We kneel at the Communion rail or come up for intinction - we feel his presence.
We sing a hymn that touches us - we feel his presence.
We look at our children and realize we are blessed- we feel his presence.
We hold a hand of a loved one in a hospital room- we feel his presence.

We gather at a funeral for a loved one - we feel his presence.

We gather food for the homeless because Jesus asked us to - we feel his presence.

We really forgive someone- we feel his presence.

Yes, we are blessed because we have not seen but believe because we have felt his presence. Always.

Heck. This is not Low Sunday - but for us it's High Sunday.

Amen- Let it be so.