Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter (Low Sunday), 15.iv.2007, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Biegue, Pennsylvania
Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 150; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31
Holy Communion, LBW - Setting 2

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from God Our Father and from Our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠Amen.

This Second Sunday of Easter is traditionally called 'Low Sunday' in the Western Church, and not without some irony. For, not only does this or any Sunday pale in comparison to the high joy of Easter Sunday, but this Sunday's attendance in many a parish church signals a kind of vacation from worship and the means of grace, a fact that may not be helped by the practice of many pastors who take a vacation Sunday today. If this Sunday is also often the

Sunday of those missing in action in the Church Militant, then today's Gospel could not be more appropriate, for it tells the story of one of the original Twelve Disciples who was missing when the Risen Christ first appeared to the remnant of that group. Hear these five verses from today's Gospel again:

> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.
>
> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."
>
> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
>
> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."
>
> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"
>
> --John 20:24-28

Thomas was not *with them* at just the right time that evening of the first Easter. It does not matter where he was. He was not *where Jesus was*, and where Jesus was was in the midst of the community of His Disciples. There was, at first, no Thomas. He had been with them that morning, hearing, and dismissing the women's proclamation of the rising of the Lord. And, he was with them now, that same evening, hearing the whole proclaiming the same thing.

But, Thomas was *late*, too late to hear the Risen Christ speak those words of peace, too late to receive the Holy Spirit with the others, too late to receive the commission to free sinners from their sins where they take responsibility for the evil and harm

they have done, or, to bind them to those sins until they do. He had not heard those words with them. He had not felt the breath of the Holy Spirit with them. He had therefore neither received the ministry of reconciliation with them, nor did he pretend in the slightest to have faith in any risen Jesus.

Thomas, who surely loved Him, had stopped believing in that back when Jesus insisted on going to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Remember how Thomas said then, "Let us also go then, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). Thomas was the fatalistic, stoic Disciple, the Disciple with no illusions. Having turned off the switch of faith, he was not about to let anyone turn it back on for him.

In John's Gospel, there is no Pentecost, no coming of the Holy Spirit, but only this story of the Sunday after Easter, and it starts out as a story of the central core of the earliest Christian community, the very beginning of the Church, as a community *dis*united, *missing* one important member because he had not believed, did not believe and would not believe. That is the way Christ finds His followers in the upper room, with not one but *two* missing. And then, the Risen Christ does something.

Is it not so in our families, in our congregation? Some, who have heard and heard and heard the Gospel, some, who have even received the grace of the Sacraments, some even, who once delighted in serving and teaching others about the

crucified and risen Lord, are, oddly, unaccountably, and by their own choice, *missing*. Not opposed to the Church, but also not convinced that her message applies to them, such absent ones point by their absence to the *dis*unity of the Church in this and every place. What is to become of them? What is to become of us when we, quietly and with no fanfare, simply cease to believe because we are too weary to hope, because we have received forgiveness too many times to believe in our own repentance, or just, 'because'?

Here is what happens to the first Disciples, to Thomas, and to us: He *returns*! He *repeats* His Words in the Disciples' midst. And, *when* He returns, Thomas is there, confronted by the risen

Christ, *there,* in the midst of his brothers and sisters, *there, here,* where we belong as though our life depended on it, because, my sisters and brothers, it *does.*

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! ✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠Amen.

S. D. G. !